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MEET AT
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THE RISE AND
FALL OF THE
SPOOK SHOWS

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PARLOUR!**

JAN BONDESON
INVITES YOU TO HIS
HAUNTED HOUSE!

**INVASION OF THE
KILLER RATS!**

1970s NIGHTMARES
WITH NIGEL KNEALE'S
BEASTS





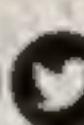
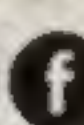
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STRANGE DAYS

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JAN BONDSON BY E. GILFILLAN

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS



WE DARE YOU TO LOOK INSIDE!

Hallowe'en is almost upon us, so we've taken the opportunity to focus this issue on the spooky side of forteana. In our cover story (p30), Brian J Robb provides a short history of one of the most fascinating, if largely forgotten, expressions of our love of enjoyable scares: the travelling spook show. It was a uniquely American phenomenon that grew out of a curious mix of séance room trickery and theatrical illusion, but also combined live acts by ballyhoo merchants (with names like Dr Silkini, El-Wyn and Ray-Mond) with movie monsters and midnight film screenings. Although the classic spook show only flourished from the 1930s to the 1960s, it left its mark on popular culture, with its gimmicky showmanship picked up by the likes of William Castle and its gothic emcees transitioning into the horror hosts of television shows.

Andrew Screen, meanwhile, takes us back to 1976, which older readers will remember not just for its record-breaking summer heat but the broadcast of Nigel Kneale's *Beasts*, a six-part series that drew on fortean phenomena and news stories – including that of Gef the Talking Mongoose – to give viewers some sleepless summer nights (p42).

Dr Paul Lee (p38) turns his attention to the world of contemporary ghost hunting – influenced as it has been in recent years by the fashion for paranormal TV programmes – sharing the results of a survey he undertook into the UK's reportedly haunted locations. One can't but admire his persistence as he gets fobbed off by stately homes, wound up by cheeky publicans and passed over in favour of profitable ghost hunts organised by commercial operators,

but he paints a somewhat bleak picture of the British ghost scene. Cheer is at hand, though, with Alan Murdie's look back at a classic ghost guide from the more innocent 1970s: Antony Hippisley Coxe's *Haunted Britain*, a gateway drug for many a budding ghost hunter of the era (p18). Jan Bondeson takes us on a tour of his own haunted houses past and present (p50), and Kate Cherrell dredges up a bit of social media supernaturalism that would probably remain forgotten if all concerned had their way: the Twitter Séance of (almost) Hallowe'en 2009 (p52).

ERRATA

433:38: Pam Teare emailed from the Isle of Man to point out an error in our Fairy Postcard Gazeteer, in which we had listed the island's fairy postcards under England: "As a Crown Dependency," she writes, "we're not even technically part of the United Kingdom, just the British Isles!"

FT434:4: Jane Dyer emailed with a correction to the 'This Year's Ripper' news item, which listed Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence and Avondale, as "Queen Victoria's eldest grandson. As Jane writes: "He wasn't – Victoria and Albert's eldest grandson (and eldest grandchild) was Prince Wilhelm of Prussia, aka Kaiser Bill."

FT434:53: There was a mistake in Jon Dear's 'The Quatermass Experiment at 70': the Prime Minister at the time of the Windscale disaster in October 1957, and its subsequent cover-up, was not Harold Wilson but Harold Macmillan. Wilson's administration did not begin until 1964. Thanks to Jim Whyteside, Pete Swindells and Rob Gandy for pointing this out.

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

NESSIE QUEST

The largest Loch Ness Monster hunt in 50 years was an inconclusive testament to Nessie's enduring appeal



ABOVE LEFT: The photo taken by Chie Kelly (below) in 2018. ABOVE RIGHT: The 'surgeon's photo' style Nessie shot snapped by 12-year-old Charlotte Robinson, also in 2018.

Following weeks of advance promotion, The Quest Weekend took place at Loch Ness on Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 August. Organised by the Loch Ness Centre in Drumnadrochit and the volunteer research team Loch Ness Exploration, the event, which Centre manager Paul Nixon insisted was not a publicity stunt, was billed as the largest Loch Ness Monster hunt in 50 years. It brought together over 100 volunteers to line the banks of the Loch to look for the monster, along with a further 300 searching the water remotely via webcams.

Alan McKenna, of Loch Ness Exploration, said, "We are looking for breaks in the surface and asking volunteers to record all manner of natural behaviour on the Loch," but warned that "Not every ripple or wave is a beastie. Some of those can be

explained, but there are handful that cannot."

Previous investigations have turned up disappointing results; the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau carried out the last mass study in 1972, but was wound up in 1977, having discovered no convincing evidence of the monster. 1987's Operation Deepscan, which used 24 boats to sweep the entire Loch with sonar, turned up three possible contacts, which ultimately could not be differentiated from large debris. Most recently, in 2019, a DNA analysis of Loch water

revealed no sign of any unusual creatures, although it did show that the Loch had a significant eel population, suggesting the monster could be a giant eel. However, a later population ecology study

showed, that this, too, was vanishingly unlikely. Despite these disappointments, visitors

"Not every ripple or wave is a beastie. Some of them can be explained."

to the Loch, and, increasingly, viewers using the webcams trained on the water and sonar in tourist boats, have been keeping hopes of finding a creature alive with regular but inconclusive sightings of mysterious shapes and shadows in the water.

As with previous searches, the Quest Weekend results also proved inconclusive. A webcam participant described a large shadow just under the surface, moving and dipping out of sight, while a couple from Hull, named only as Matty and Aga, videoed what they described as moving "humps" which then disappeared. They said that they "can't explain what it was, but it was pretty impressive". Another online observer saw an anomalous object in a boat's

wake – "Something long and narrow breaks surface first, followed by a black humpy round object that rises and submerges" – and captured screen shots that could potentially show an otter. While checking equipment in advance, members of the Loch Ness Exploration team heard several "gloops" on their hydrophones, but failed to record them for later analysis, which might have been able to determine whether the sounds came from something living or from decaying material on the Loch floor. Thermal imaging drones were also deployed by a film company, but they are holding back results for a documentary to be released later in the year.

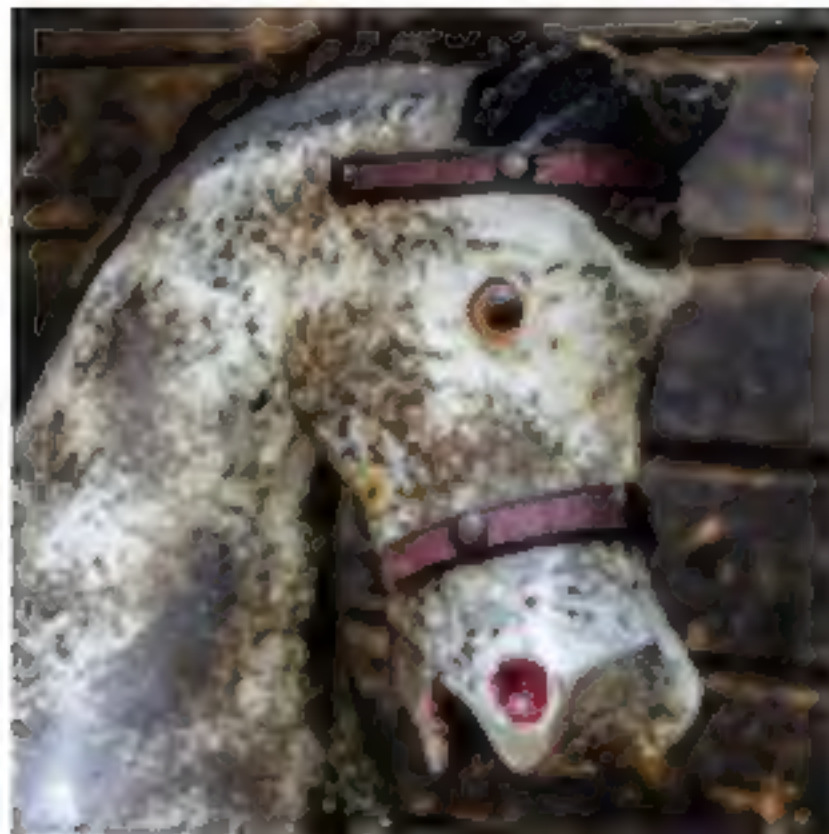
The event, though, did inspire Chie Kelly, 51, to go public with alleged monster photos that she took on a visit to the Loch in 2018 but had kept quiet about for fear of being ridiculed. Kelly said that "about 200 metres (656ft) from the shore, moving right to left at a steady speed, was this



CHIE KELLY / PETER JOLLY NORTHPIX

PETER JOLLY NORTHPIX

CHARLOTTE ROBINSON / PETER JOLLY NORTHPIX



ILL-STARRED OBJECTS

Haunted horse, cursed painting and Devil doll

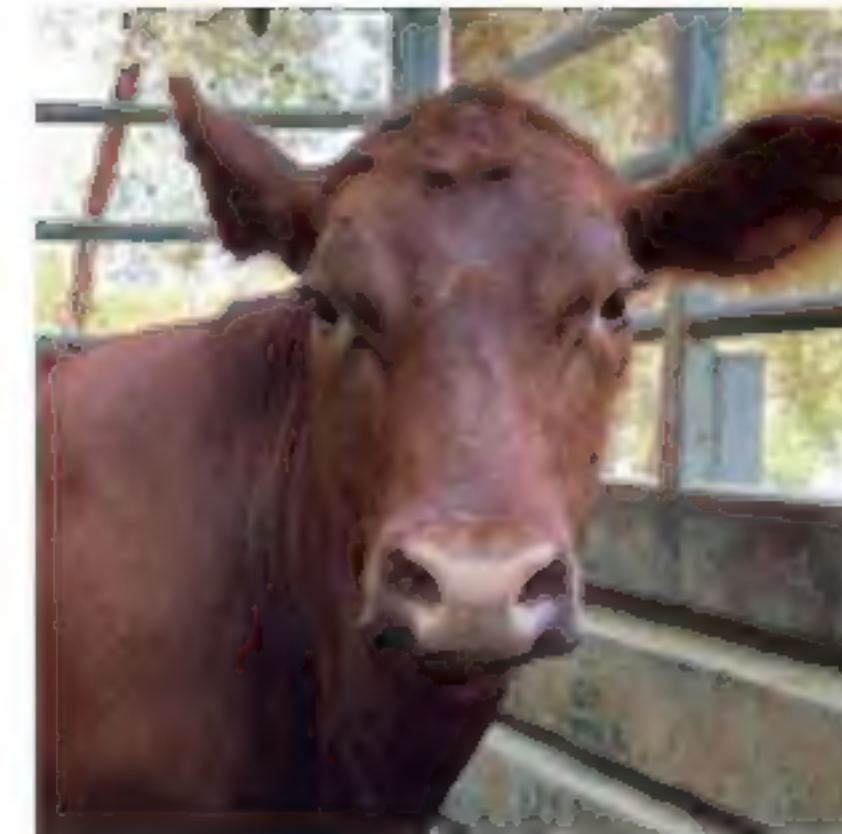
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SILPHIUM SURVIVAL?

Pliny's long-lost miracle plant found in Turkey

PAGE 10



APOCALYPSE COW

Red heifers find new home in Shiloh

PAGE 24



JEFF J MITCHELL / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Quest Weekend organiser Alan McKenna of Loch Ness Exploration (left) joins enthusiasts on board a boat on Loch Ness.
BELOW: Charlotte Kelly was just 12 in 2018 when she photographed "a neck and head in the shape of a hook."

creature. It was spinning and rolling at times. We never saw a head or neck. After a couple of minutes, it just disappeared and we never saw it again. I could not accurately assess its length, but the two parts that were visible were less than two metres (6.6ft) long together." Steve Feltham, who moved to Loch Ness in 1991 and has been a full-time monster hunter ever since, said: "These are the most exciting surface pictures I have seen. They are exactly the type of pictures I have been wanting to take for three decades." It also prompted Charlotte Robinson, from Leeds in Yorkshire, to come forward with a photo she had taken while visiting Loch Ness on 17 August 2018, when she was 12. She says she saw "a neck and head in the shape of a hook", which popped up out of the water, then disappeared, before resurfacing elsewhere for about a minute. She photographed this, resulting in an image not unlike the famed Surgeon's Photo, which is now

known to have been hoaxed.

While Kelly's photos do show two hump-like shapes, it is difficult to say whether they show any kind of animal or not, particularly as no head or appendage is visible, and both their shape and reported behaviour match that of decaying logs in the Loch. These are known to be buoyed to the surface by decomposition gases, where they may bob and roll for a few minutes as the gas escapes, before sinking again. Paranormal researcher Hayley Stevens said: "I personally think it is most likely that they saw a large sturgeon in the Loch," but the DNA analysis that raised the possibility of giant eels also found no evidence of sturgeon living in Loch Ness.



With Robinson's photo, no features can be discerned on the "head" and there is nothing visible to tie it to Loch Ness,

nor to give any idea of scale, as it can't be determined how close to the object the foreground vegetation is. As a result, it cannot be said for sure that the picture was actually taken at Loch Ness, or how big the object is and even whether it is an animal, although its reported behaviour suggests it may have been an otter. Unfortunately, due to these shortcomings, it's not possible to say whether any of these photos show the monster (or indeed any kind of animal), are misperceptions of a known natural phenomenon or another hoax. *BBC News*, 26+27 Aug; *nypost.com*, *lochness.com*, 31 Aug; *telegraph.co.uk*, 3 Sept 2023.

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

IS IT OK TO LET YOUR SNAKES SUNBATH IN THE PARK?

BBC News, 16 June 2023.

What to cook this week: a savoury Dutch baby with honey and lemon

New York Times, 2 July 2023.

SCIENTISTS THINK SPACETIME MAY HAVE COME FROM MAGIC

popularmechanics.com, 1 May 2023.

Nottinghamshire banana plant bears fruit months after husband's death

BBC News, 4 Aug 2023.

JOE PASQUALE IMPALED IN FREAK MOOSE ANTLER INCIDENT IN SKEGNESS

BBC News, 5 Aug 2023.

PETER JOLLY NORTHPIX



SIDELINES

SLEEPING SPEEDER

When police on an autobahn near Bamberg, Germany, attempted to stop a driver travelling at 110kph (68mph), they failed to get a response, even when they sounded their horn and flashed their lights. They noticed that the man seemed to be asleep and had his hands off the wheel, but the car continued to drive at high speed for a further 15 minutes until the man awoke. His Tesla had been operating on autopilot and when he finally stopped, the driver showed signs of drug use. He was also found to have attached a weight to the wheel to fool the system into acting as if he still had his hands on it. Unsurprisingly, he was charged with reckless driving. *netherlands.posten.com, 30 Dec 2022.*

STONED SWANS

Medicinal poppy farmers near the Slovakian town of Komarno are having their business ruined by drug-addled swans. Two hundred of the birds settled in the area, attracted by large pools of water, but after eating the poppies all day the birds became addicted to the opium-containing seeds. Some have become so stoned they can no longer fly, making them easy targets for predators, and several dozen have overdosed. The swans have done more than £8,500 of damage to the crop, but farmers can't evict them as they are a protected species. *oddiycentral.com, 20 Jun 2023.*

ABIT LATE

Posters advertising a retirement community in Skelton-in-Cleveland went up on bus shelters across North Yorkshire without anyone spotting the typo that left them reading "Skeleton Court Care Home". *D. Mail, 27 May 2023*

RISE OF THE ROBOTS

Flamethrower dogs, eztra arms and droids gone bad



UNITREE ROBOTICS



N. YAMAMURA ET AL

ABOVE LEFT: Unitree Robotics's slightly sinister looking Go2 robot dog. **ABOVE RIGHT:** a pair of dancers wearing 'jizai arms' in a promotional video for the new technology. **BELOW:** A robot dog mounted with a flamethrower – what could possibly go wrong?

ROBODOG

Unitree Robotics, a company from Hangzhou, China, has launched a robotic pet dog known as Go2, which it hails as a "revolution in the field of robotics". Described as an "intelligent quadruped robot", Go2 can climb stairs, fetch sticks, play music from a built-in speaker and take photos on command. It uses a camera positioned where the dog's face would be and sends the pictures straight to the owner's smartphone. It can also dance, do a handstand while wiggling its legs in the air and rush to greet its owner, jumping up and saying "Welcome home" in a slightly sinister robotic voice. A promotional video accompanying the launch shows the robot running with a real dog, jumping between rocks and negotiating a hedge maze. Go2 can also have an extendable arm with a claw on the end mounted on its back so that it can pick up objects. Its responses are driven by a built-in AI that enables it to react to commands and questions in a human-like way, and it navigates using LIDAR, which builds 3D models and maps of nearby objects using reflected light. With these various technologies the robot can learn the "unique characteristics" of the user, making it their "closest friend", according to Unitree, but they are silent on whether it then shares this data with the company or anyone else. Go2 is similar to Spot, the robot dog



It can greet its owner, saying "Welcome home" in a sinister voice

made by rival US manufacturer Boston Dynamics, but cheaper, although it still comes in at \$1,600 (£1,240). *dailymail.co.uk, 21 Jul 2023.*

HOT DOG

Taking things a step further is ThrowFlame, apparently the oldest flamethrower manufacturer in the US. The company has taken a robot dog, which looks to be Boston Dynamics' Spot, and mounted a rechargeable flamethrower on its back. Named the "Thermonator", the robot can now blast flames to a range of up to 30ft (9m). Having previously created a flame throwing drone, ThrowFlame is now signing up potential buyers in advance of the Thermonator's

release date, no doubt with an eye on the military and police markets, as the Australian Army and New York Police Department are already operating robot dogs in a variety of roles. ThrowFlame is also accepting private clients; while privately owned flamethrowers are forbidden in the UK, they are legal in most US states. *nbcnews.com, 23 Jun 2023.*

ROBOT MONSTER

Masahiko Inami's team at the University of Tokyo have been carrying out research to explore what life might be like if humans could rent cyborg body parts as easily as they can a car. They have developed a series of technologies that they call 'jizai', a Japanese word that suggests autonomy and the freedom to do as one pleases. The first of these is a set of four wearable robotic arms that can be worn attached to a person's back, resembling something out of Spider-Man. Inami says the aim is to create something like the relationship a musician has with an instrument, "lying somewhere between a human and a tool, like how a musical instrument can become as if a part of your body... It supports us and can unlock creativity," he says. The promotional video for the 'Jizai Arms' shows two ballet dancers performing wearing the robotic arms, with human and robot seeming perfectly integrated. Inami says his inspiration for the robot arms was traditional Japanese puppetry and a short

THROWFLAME



MARTIN ROSS



HAZEL NICHOLSON / CREATIVE COMMONS



ABOVE: Two vicious-looking droids loitering with intent outside a Co-op store. Dog walkers beware! **BELOW:** San Francisco's Safe Street Rebel strikes again, turning another driverless taxi into an immobilised unicorn.

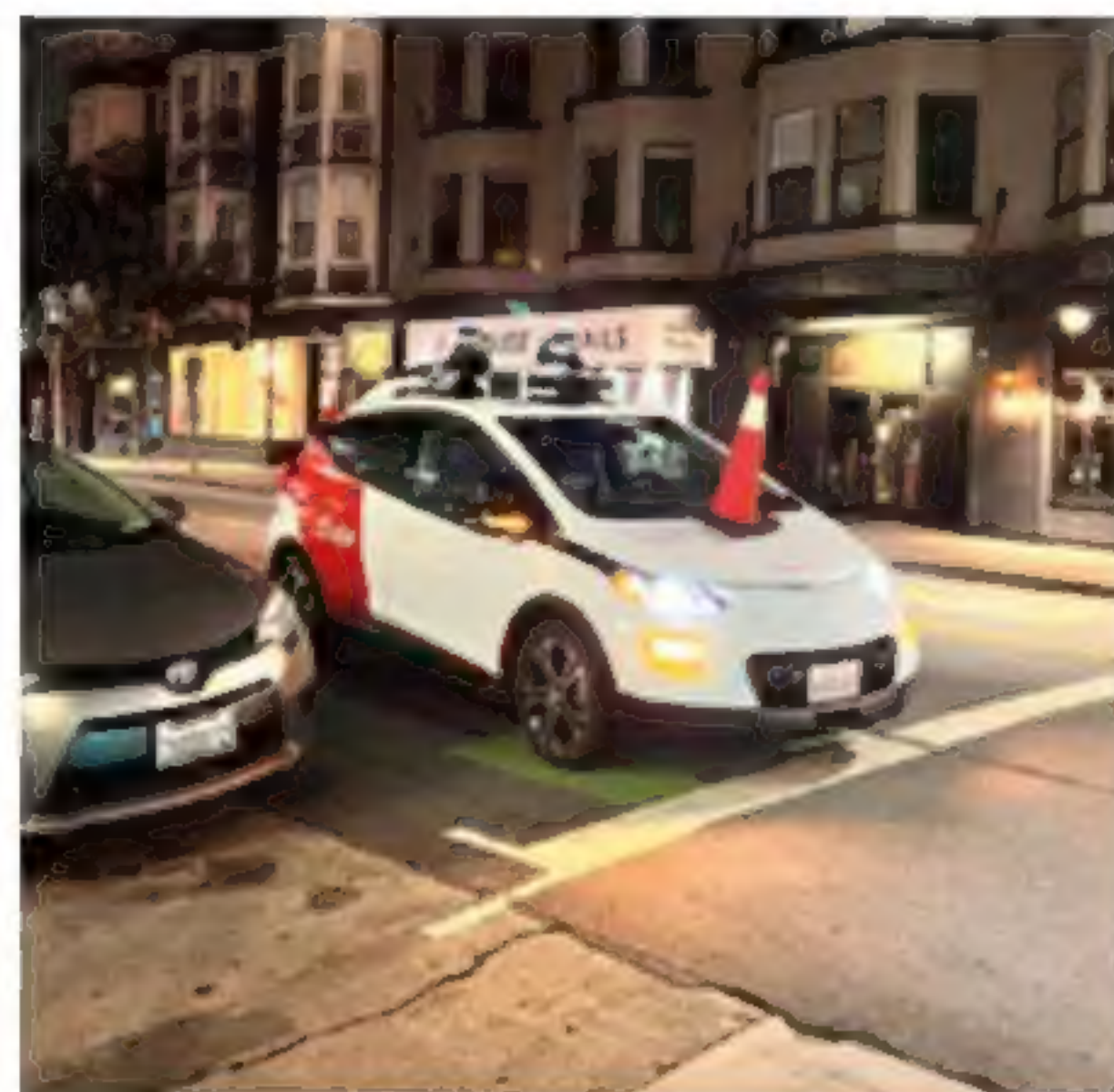
SAFE STREET REBEL / TWITTER

story by novelist Yasunari Kawabata about a man who borrows a young woman's arm and spends the night with it. He says that people get so used to the arms that "taking them off after using them for a while feels a little sad. That's where they're a little different to other tools." He sees great potential for such enhancements, saying: "In the future we might see wings growing out of people's backs, or drones attached to people... Maybe someone will come up with a sport that requires six arms or invent a new type of swimming." [Reuters] 27 Jun 2023.

THE REVOLUTION BEGINS

During a pilot scheme run by the Co-op in Milton Keynes, a robotic delivery droid had a run-in with dog walker Brian Dawson, 56, and his German shepherd Pippa. "It came towards me at considerable speed and hit Pippa, who's 12 and a bit dodderly," said Dawson. "I gave it a bit of a kick... but it came straight for me again and hit my left leg... It seemed to have a mind of its own. I ended up shoving it on its side, but that triggered its alarm." He eventually righted the robot and complained to the local store, which denied responsibility.

The Co-op droids have been trialled in several cities and have encountered a few hitches. In Cambridge a cyclist saw seven of the droids queuing up at a pedestrian crossing after the one at the front "shuffled about a bit, then stopped". One of the



droids reportedly then asked a "surprised" passer-by to press the crossing button. Operated for the Co-op by Estonian tech company Starship Technologies, the droids can travel at 4mph (6.4kph), carry up to three bags of shopping and navigate using 12 cameras linked to an AI. The company's website describes them as "incredibly intelligent" and "safe". D.Mail, 20 Jun 2023.

HUMANS FIGHT BACK

In San Francisco, Google has been testing its Waymo robotic taxis, while General Motors have been experimenting with their similar driverless Cruise vehicles, but Bay Area residents have not been very happy with the results. The autonomous vehicles have randomly stalled, jamming busy streets and blocking emergency services, including ambulances trying to reach victims of a mass shooting. One also reportedly ran over a dog deliberately, and they have proved less effective than human drivers at getting people to their destinations. However, encouraged by a group calling themselves Safe Street

Rebel, residents have started to fight back, opposing expansion of the area in which the taxis are allowed to operate and disabling them by placing traffic cones on their bonnets, which confuses the vehicles and brings them to a permanent standstill. boingboing.net, 9 Jul 2023.

ROBLOWJOB

Sex toy entrepreneur Brian Sloan, inventor of the "Autoblow" robotic masturbation sleeve, has been granted a patent for the "control of sexual stimulation devices using electroencephalography", which enables a user to direct the gadget using their thoughts. He has previously marketed a voice-controlled version of the device and created the Automoblow, a robotic arm that extends from a car's cupholder to pleasure the driver. Many of his developments are underpinned by detailed research. He has published "the Blowjob Paper", for which he paid several men in Serbia to watch and document 108 hours of fellatio to create a dataset that defined porn performers' optimum rhythm for the activity. He then used this to programme the motions of one version of his device. For his latest creation, he worked with a university brain-computer interface research group for three months, but they declined to have their identity revealed in the paper "due to potential negative career impacts based on the sexual nature of the commissioned work". vice.com, 24 Jul 2023.

SIDELINES

BAFFLED BY BUTTER

A visitor to the US who asked for the bread on his sandwich to be buttered was surprised by the result; the sandwich he received had been buttered on the outside. After he posted a picture of the sticky sarnie on Reddit, many commenters pointed out that in the US bread for sandwiches is not buttered, but most agreed with the person who said, "Surely just logic alone would tell you the butter would be on the inside". dailymail.co.uk, 11 May 2023.

SURPRISE AWAKENING

Mark Dicara, 62, of Lake County, Illinois, was awakened from sleep by a searing pain in his leg. He had been dreaming that there was an intruder entering his flat whom he had fired at with his .357 Magnum pistol. In fact, he had shot himself in the leg with the gun while asleep. The bullet went straight through, lodging in the mattress, and he was rushed to hospital bleeding heavily but survived. mirror.co.uk, 15 Jun 2023.

A NAKED MAN...

A man in his 40s was arrested in Queen Elizabeth Park, Salisbury, after startling locals by stripping naked and attempting to have sex with a tree stump in the middle of the day. He was filmed by an observer as he took his clothes off, kissed, caressed, and rubbed himself against the remains of a conifer in the park, after which police swiftly detained him for indecent exposure. "I'd be worried about the splinters," one onlooker commented. news.com.au, 16 Jun 2023.

FREEZER FAIL

A freezer at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, had a sign on it saying "This freezer is beeping as it is under repair. Please do not move or unplug it. No cleaning required in this area", but the janitor still unplugged it because of "annoying alarms", causing at least \$1million of damage and destroying 25 years of researchers' cell cultures, samples and other materials. Even when he had this explained to him, the janitor "did not appear to believe he had done anything wrong but was just trying to help". foxnews.com, 26 Jun 2023.



SIDELINES...

NICE WORK...

Teacher Cinzia Paolina De Lio from Venice, Italy, was dismissed by the education ministry for having been absent from school for 20 of the 24 years she had been employed as a teacher. During a brief period in 2015 when she did teach, inspectors condemned her lessons as “unprepared” and “inattentive” and described her marking as “random and improvised”, while students boycotted her classes as she was permanently on her phone. She claimed her absences were for sickness, personal or family reasons, and that she had documents to prove it, but the high court confirmed her dismissal, saying she showed a “permanent and absolute ineptitude”. *BBC News*, 27 Jun 2023.

FEISTY FISH

As Katherine Perkins, 70, struggled to reel in a seven-stone (44.5 kg) sailfish she had hooked while fishing off Florida, it leapt out of the water and skewered her in the groin with its pointed bill, requiring her to be rushed to hospital for treatment. *<i>*, 25 Jul 2022.

COWABUNGA

A four-year-old Charolais has been dubbed the world’s most intelligent cow after earning the Guinness record for the most tricks performed by a cow in 60 seconds. Ghost, from Sheridan County, Nebraska, performed 10 tricks in 60 seconds. Her trainer, Megan Reimann, said cows were easier to train than horses and that Ghost’s winning tricks included staying in place, coming when called, spinning, bowing, doing a fist-bump/leg lift, standing on a pedestal, stepping into a lasso, touching a bell and nodding her head as if to say “yes” for rewards of cookies and scratches behind the ears. *cbc.ca*, 3 Jul 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

CURSED! | A spooky painting is among the latest uncanny objects found on sale, while an office undergoes exorcism



LEFT: The cursed painting in the St Leonards charity shop window. FACING PAGE: The Canterbury rocking horse.

CURSED PAINTING

A painting of a young girl donated to the Hastings Advice Representation Centre (HARC) charity shop in St Leonards-on-Sea, Sussex, has gained a reputation for being cursed after being twice returned to the shop by purchasers who had unsettling experiences after buying it. It had been donated by a middle-aged man, who dropped it off along with several other pictures and frames, and Steve Elledge, the shop’s manager, immediately noticed the sitter’s strange expression with eyes that “follow you around the room”. It was sold to a woman, who, according to Elledge “came in two days later and said ‘I’ve got to get rid of this picture’ and that it had an ‘aura about it’, so we put it in the window [with a sign] saying ‘possibly cursed’”. A few days later it sold a second time, but the buyer returned “terrified” and “shaky and distressed” soon after, “saying she never wanted to see the damned thing again”. The shop then put it in the window

“They are using the material that we made to keep them away”

with a sign reading “She’s back! Sold twice and returned twice! Are you brave enough?” This led to considerable social media attention, after which the second buyer asked for it back. “When she saw it had so many views she changed her mind. She thinks now it’s got some sort of monetary value... She’s decided she’s no longer scared and she can put up with it,” said Elledge. “No one here thinks it’s a real cursed picture... nothing evil happened here,” he added, saying, “it was a humorous thing as none of us believed it.”

The *Daily Mail* tracked down the second purchaser, Zoe Elliott-Brown, 36, who explained the effect the picture had on her life. She said that as soon as she got it home the

family’s Patterdale terrier, Cilla, was “instantly growling” at the painting and “wouldn’t go anywhere near it”. She also said that her mother, Jayne, 68, immediately experienced serious health problems, suffering from hot flushes, turning shaky and having to wear four jumpers to keep warm. Elliott-Brown says that her mother is “transfixed” by the painting and “was weirdly protective over it. She was continually staring at it. She was running her fingers over its cheekbones, she polished it even though it didn’t need polishing. Any mention of getting rid of it... she got really snappy. It’s like some family heirloom she’s become protective over.” Elliott-Brown added that “it kind of draws you into it, but then you don’t really want to be near it at the same time. It is almost a bit like Gollum in *Lord of the Rings*.” Jayne, though, doesn’t feel there’s anything weird going on, saying, “I personally didn’t put it down to the picture, Zoe did. She felt odd about it ever since it’s been here,” although she admitted that “there were a few odd things; someone kept tapping on the door and there was nobody there.” Elliott-Brown also said that while out for a woodland walk during a thunderstorm with her partner Ben, they entered a clearing and “saw a ‘big black figure standing in front of them... We both looked at this figure thing and said ‘What is that?’ at the same time. [Ben] grabbed me and we began running back the way we had come. He was screaming that it was right behind him.” Reflecting on the experience, Elliott-Brown said, “I didn’t clock that it could be anything to do with the picture, but then I’ve never ever been chased by a dark figure in a lightning storm. It was the most terrifying experience of both our lives.” At that point Elliott-Brown returned the painting to

HARC



the shop, but went back twice, intrigued to see if someone else had bought it and eventually felt “compelled” to take it home again. She is now hoping to get in contact with a professional who can lift the supposed curse of the painting and is keeping it in a box with some sage, which she hoped “would cleanse it a bit. We put sage all around the corners of my mum’s house too, which she wasn’t best pleased about”. *telegraph.co.uk*, 23 Aug; *insider.com*, 24 Aug; *dailymail.co.uk*, 26 Aug 2023.

HAUNTED HORSE

An auction house in Canterbury, Kent, has put an allegedly haunted rocking horse on sale. Its owner, named only as Kelly, said her great-grandfather Dick Godden, a well-known medium, had used the dappled grey horse to help summon spirits. During séances held at his home, Godden communicated with the spirit of a young girl named Angela whom he believed was playing on the toy horse and she apparently admitted rocking on it. Godden normally kept the horse on the landing, but, according to Kelly: “One day my great-grandma Irene came home to an empty house and the horse had been moved into the middle of the living room.” The rocking horse has also been blamed for frequent mysterious noises in the current owner’s home. “There would often be the sound of someone walking around upstairs,” she said. “On more than one occasion, I would hear a huge bang from one of the rooms upstairs. Thinking it was something falling off a windowsill, I would rush up there and absolutely nothing would be out of place. It did make me wonder.” Kelly said that her 10-year-old daughter never liked the horse or played with it and, having become a Christian, she has decided to sell it. “I really feel that whoever bids on it should know, even though I realise that might put some people off,” she said. The auction house gave the horse an estimate of £200 to £300, saying, “The supernatural element of this item has not determined the estimates put on it”, but, after the media interest in it, the horse eventually sold for £1,750 to “a museum of the



occult in Las Vegas”. *foxnews.com*, 23 Jul; *kentonline.co.uk*, 30 Jul 2023.

DEVIL DOLL

Christopher Hawksworth, 48, believes that a doll bought by his daughter for £3 at an antiques fair is possessed and is responsible for a series of calamities that have befallen him. His daughter Violet named the doll “Normand” and on the way home from the fair told her father, “Normand doesn’t like you Daddy.” The next day, Hawksworth suffered from a burst appendix, causing a near-fatal infection that put him in intensive care for a week; when he returned to work after being discharged, his employer cut his pay by a third. Later, during a row with Violet, he threw Normand to the floor; immediately after that, his car brakes failed at the top of a hill and, he said, “I start hurtling down at 40mph and manage to steer and handbrake into the side of the road to avoid killing me and other people.” After this, he says, “The car was written off with catastrophic engine failure”. The next day, while walking in a park, someone shot him in the stomach with an air rifle, drawing blood, and the culprit has never been caught. It is not just Hawksworth who seems to attract the alleged wrath of Normand. His mother, aged 88, threw the doll about when visiting – causing Violet to say, “Normand doesn’t like it” – and a few days later was rushed to

hospital suffering from serious nosebleeds. Hawksworth has tried in vain to get Violet to relinquish the doll for a new one, and says things are only fine when the doll is “treated well”, adding “I’m terrified of it. What has it witnessed? It definitely has an aura or energy”. *Sun*, 8 Jul 2023.

EVIL OFFICE

It is claimed that after a large number of employees resigned from right-wing US activist group the Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC) in a row over pay, senior staff member Matt Schlapp believed the office was cursed and had it exorcised to drive out the “satanic spirits” that he allegedly held responsible for the mass walkout. Reports claim that he had a priest process round the CPAC premises and bless all the staff, regardless of their faith. The priest then placed medallions showing St Benedict, the patron saint of exorcism, over office doors to ward off evil spirits. Witnesses to the event said that the rite included a prayer circle in Schlapp’s office, described as performative and inauthentic, “like a show,” by one source. Another said, “As the priest made his way through the office, spritzing holy water room to room, employees nudged him towards Matt’s office... The way he had treated junior employees, it seemed to us like he was the one who needed it the most.” *thedailybeast.com*, 31 Aug 2023.

SIDELINES...

TODDLER TROUBLE

Police believe that a toddler playing with an old mobile phone has been responsible for more than 3,000 calls to the 999 emergency number in just six weeks. All the calls come from the same number in Jersey and originate from an old Samsung phone without a sim card. These can still make calls to emergency numbers, even though they can’t make any other calls. *Sun*, 23 Jun 2023.

BOUNCY BOMBER

Bouncy castle operator Jack Balcome from Melbourne, Australia, was jailed for 11 years for a reign of terror intended to rid his area of competition. Over several months in 2016 and early 2017 he hired Craig Anderson to firebomb other bouncy castle operator’s premises with Molotov cocktails, with the result that his company, Awesome Party Hire, was soon number one in Google’s rankings for the region. Fearful that suspicions might arise because his premises were unscathed, he eventually had his own building torched as well, but to no avail, as Anderson shopped him to police. *<i>19 May 2023.*

HELLO KITTY

Following a tip-off, police in Nizhny Tagil, Russia, arrested a woman for drug smuggling. When arrested she appeared to be carrying a baby, but when officers unzipped the “child’s” snowsuit, they found a confused-looking grey cat inside. The animal was wearing a nappy, a babygrow, shoes and woollen hat, and police found several packages containing methylephedrine, a stimulant, packed in the snowsuit legs. *D.Telegraph*, 21 Apr 2023.

FLORIDA MAN

A man holding up a phone repair shop in Miami, Florida, disguised himself by putting a cardboard box over his head to conceal his face and got away with 19 iPhones and \$8,000 in cash. However, having been handed the loot, he briefly lifted the box up to get a better look at his haul, enabling the manager to recognise him when he spotted him shortly afterwards drinking outside a nearby liquor store. He called the police, who swiftly apprehended the thief. *metro.co.uk*, 5 Jun 2023.

SIDELINES...

FLAME ON

Police in Germany are seeking a man named only as 'Nick S', 24, after a wave of hotel fires in the city of Leipzig. They believe he is a fire alarm fetishist aroused by the sound of sirens and mass panic who was deliberately setting the fires for self-gratification. Initially believing that the fires were accidental, police realised there was a likely connection when they discovered that 'Nick S' had been a guest at every hotel that caught fire, and found incriminating evidence in belongings he had left behind. *Times*, 7 Jan 2023.

FOOLING NO ONE

In Springfield, Colorado, police who pulled over a suspected drunk driver watched with amusement as he switched to the passenger side of the car and put his dog behind the wheel as they approached. He then got out of the car and insisted he had not been driving, but attempted to make a run for it when officers asked him about his drinking. Police charged him with driving while ability impaired, driving under suspension, speeding and resisting arrest and reported that the dog "was let go with just a warning". *boingboing.net*, 16 May 2023.

MISS-TREE

Residents in West Dulwich, London, have been experiencing a mysterious wave of tree thefts. Someone has been digging up and taking away trees and shrubs from gardens and public spaces, often in broad daylight. The culprit, believed to be a man in his 60s, has twice been spotted wheeling the vegetation off on a trolley, David Harrison, 61, saw him walking off with a tree the council had planted, leaving a gaping hole in the ground. "The tree was about 10ft (3m) high," he said. *D.Mail*, 18 Apr 2023.



MARTIN ROSS

SILPHIUM SURVIVAL

Pliny's long-lost miracle plant discovered in modern Turkey?

In ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, the silphium plant was believed to have almost miraculous properties (see **FT221:77**). It had a thick stalk with yellow flowers and was crushed, roasted, sauteed and boiled for medicinal purposes. It was claimed to be effective against coughs, sore throats, fever, indigestion, aches and pains, warts, and many other afflictions; it was also used as a contraceptive and abortifacient. Silphium grew on the North African coast in Cyrenaica, now part of Libya, and was vital to the economy of the city of Cyrene, whose coins carried an image of the plant. However, by the time Pliny the Elder was writing his *Natural History* in the first century AD, silphium was all but extinct. He records that "just one stalk has been found and it has been given to Emperor Nero", which is the final documented record of the plant, although culinary compilations continued to recommend it as an ingredient until at least the eighth century, probably because they were copying classical texts. In the following two millennia, even the exact identity of silphium was lost, as botanists carried out fruitless searches for it and debated what kind of plant it might have been. As a result, it was thought that Pliny's report of the last silphium was the first record of an extinction of any species.

However, Mahmut Miski, a researcher in medicines derived from natural sources at Istanbul University, believes that he has rediscovered silphium. He has identified *Ferula drudeana*, which grows on Mount Hasan in Turkey, almost 1,000 miles (1,600km) from Cyrene, as the fabled plant. It belongs to the same family as carrots, fennel, and parsley, and has a thick stem, branching root and yellow flowers, strongly resembling the image on Cyrenian coins. In addition, it produces more than 30 metabolites that have medicinal properties, including anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer compounds. Local

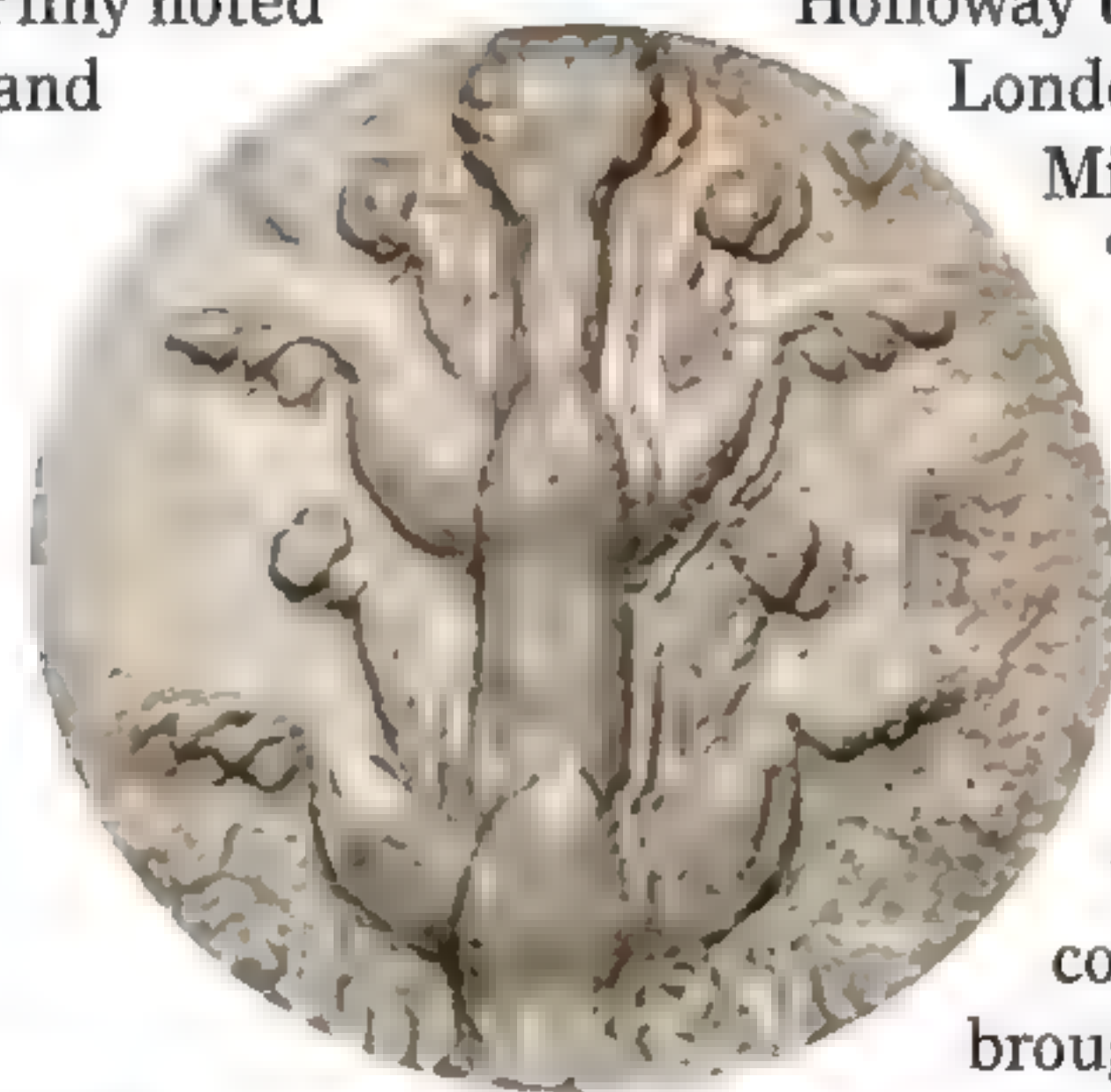


MAHMUT MISKI / ISTANBUL UNIVERSITY

ABOVE: *Ferula drudeana* growing in Turkey – were seeds brought from Cyrenaica to Cappadocia? BELOW: An ancient silver coin from Cyrene depicting silphium.

herdsmen told Miski that *Ferula* was a favourite food of goats, something that Pliny noted about silphium, and it appears just after spring rains, again as recorded by Pliny. In its prime, silphium had to be harvested from the wild as it proved impossible to cultivate successfully, and Miski has found that *Ferula* is also exceedingly difficult to grow, only succeeding in establishing it in a greenhouse by using sophisticated modern botanical techniques. Erica

Rowan, an associate professor in archaeobotany at Royal Holloway University of London, agrees with Miski's deduction. "The ancients were very good at transporting things," she says, "There's no reason why people from Cyrenaica couldn't have brought the seeds to Cappadocia and planted them. They're similar enough with a Mediterranean climate. And this *Ferula* species does look like what's shown on the coins". *greekreporter.com*, 23 Aug 2023.



THE C NSPIRASPHERE

With the tragic demise of Tafari Campbell, two former White House chefs have ended up dead in weird watery circumstances. Coincidence or the beginning of a cluster? asks **NOEL ROONEY**.

IF YOU CAN'T STAND THE HEAT...

As occupations go, celebrity chef is not especially risky; to reputation perhaps, but not to life and limb. Chef to a celebrity, on the other hand, appears to be a rather more perilous gig. And then there is the vexed matter of coincidence.

The tragic demise of Tafari Campbell, chef to the Obama family, has excited more than a few ripples in the conspiracist pond. The circumstances of his death are confused and confusing, a situation not helped by what seems to be a knee-jerk tendency on the part of high-profile figures to become overly secretive when bad things happen around them. And where uncertainty lurks, theories are born.

At first, reports suggested that Campbell was a non-swimmer who had (inexplicably to some) gone paddle-boarding and come unstuck. There was some confusion about who had contacted the emergency services, and an apparent delay between the tragedy happening and being reported. And there were conflicting reports as to whether the Obama family was in residence at the Martha's Vineyard mansion when the unfortunate Mr Campbell died.

Soon videos emerged showing Campbell swimming very proficiently. That set the conspiracist cat among the media pigeons. Some pointed out that, while media reports stated that the Obamas were not at home, there was no official record of them being anywhere else at the time. When it emerged that Campbell's body was found naked, his clothes neatly piled some distance away, suspicions grew and rumours flew.

A few days after the incident, ex-president Obama appeared on a golf course,



At first, reports suggested that Campbell was a non-swimmer

sporting a black eye and bandages on his hand; that was enough to ignite the fuse on the juggernaut of speculation. It's unfortunate for Mr Obama that, at the same time, an old associate of his from Chicago was doing the rounds of alternative media outlets telling everyone who wanted to listen (so a good proportion of the righteous American right, then) that the former president was gay and indulged in class A drugs.

That's quite a list of coincidences. But there's more; it turns out that Tafari Campbell was not the first chef to a presidential family who had died in mysterious circumstances involving water. Walter Scheib was the chef to the Clinton family; prior to that, he had been the White House chef during the tenure of George W Bush. In 2015, Mr Scheib disappeared while he was on a hiking trip in New Mexico. Several days later, his lifeless body was discovered in a mountain run-off drain.

Scheib had been hiking alone, and it was unclear how he had come to be in a flood

drain some way off his planned route. At the time, there was some rumbling in the C-sphere, but nothing like a full-blown tsunami; surprising, perhaps, given the popularity of the Clinton Body Count. Campbell's death by drowning changed all that.

The basic premise is that, even as far below

the corridors of power as the kitchen, secrets leach through (or trickle down, to use the appropriate economic metaphor). Why this leakage should affect only the chef, as opposed, say, to the person doing the washing-up, is not explained. I imagine the chef gets to talk to the president more often than the washer-up, but I also assume the conversation is more likely to include state banquets than state secrets.

The coincidence here, glaring as it is, strikes me as more the territory of Loren Coleman than Alex Jones. That is, from certain angles it could look like the beginning of a cluster. I also found myself thinking about the courts of mediæval potentates and Roman emperors, where the role of chef might on occasion be more martial than merely gastronomic. In those circumstances, a convenient death by drowning ("Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome, and as tall as you") would look rather less like an accident than the tying up of loose ends.

But thinking back on it, I can't recall anything so much as a White House dinner guest with a stomach upset making the news, let alone a fatal incident involving food; ah well, so much for Baroque fantasies. Or maybe not.

LEFT: Tafari Campbell during his time as a White House chef.

Two ex-White House chefs, both now working for ex-presidential families, families with a certain amount of baggage (or a closet full of bones, depending on one's view); both end up dead in odd circumstances, made more confusing through unnecessary obfuscation on the part of the families and their – probably paranoid; that's what they're paid for – security apparatus. You can see why some in the C-sphere might smell a rat soufflé, although if I were in that camp I'd be putting my money on honey ale beer (a personal favourite of Mr Obama's, apparently created by Campbell).

There is a signal difference between the two cases that appears to have gone unnoticed in the C-sphere. The Scheib case has no personal elements; any conspiracy theory based on it must go the route of secret politics and the deep state, though quite why TPTB would be moved to off a cook is hard to fathom. The Campbell case, on the other hand, is based exclusively on personal connections; it relies on the rumours of Obama's sexuality to fuel its expansion.

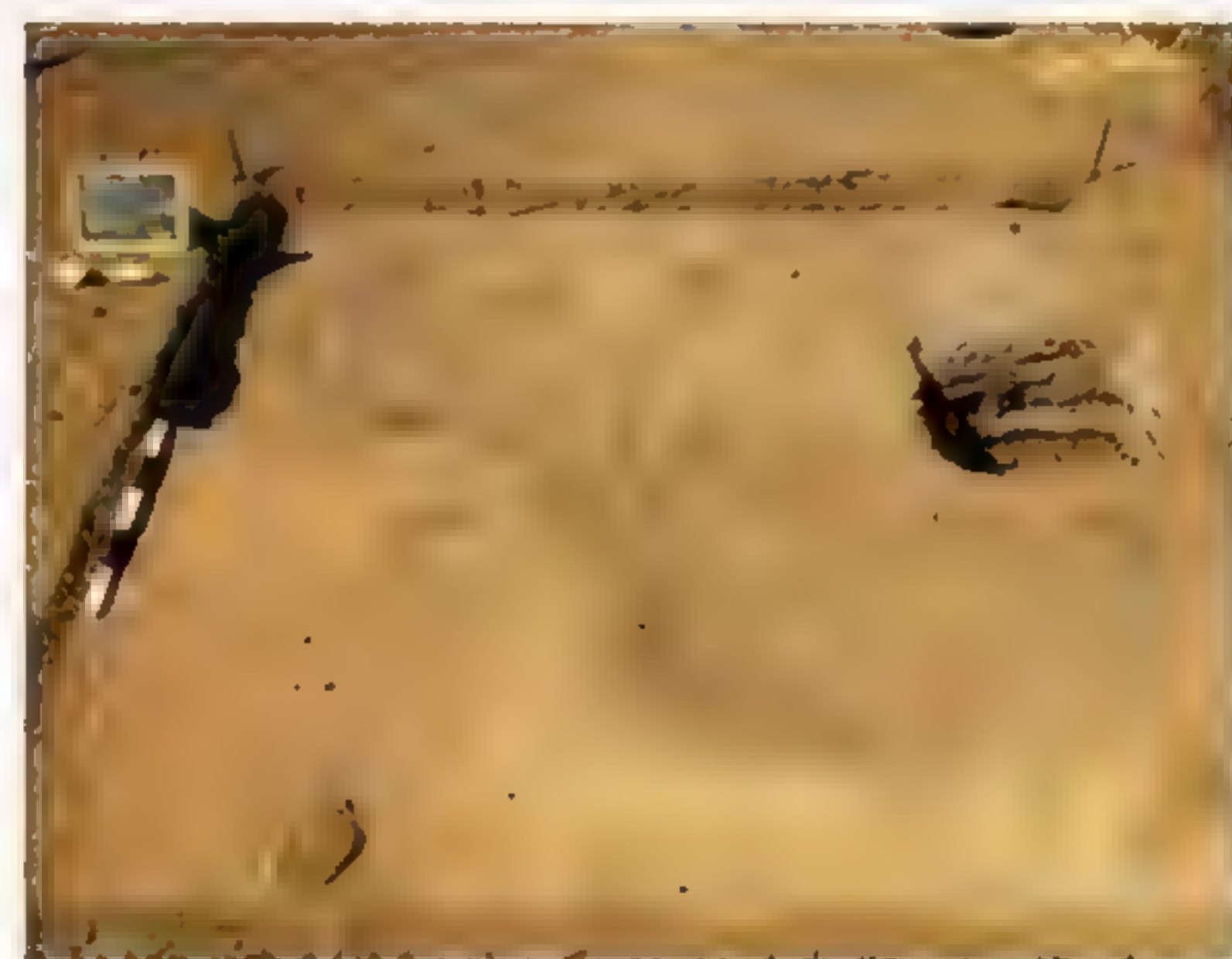
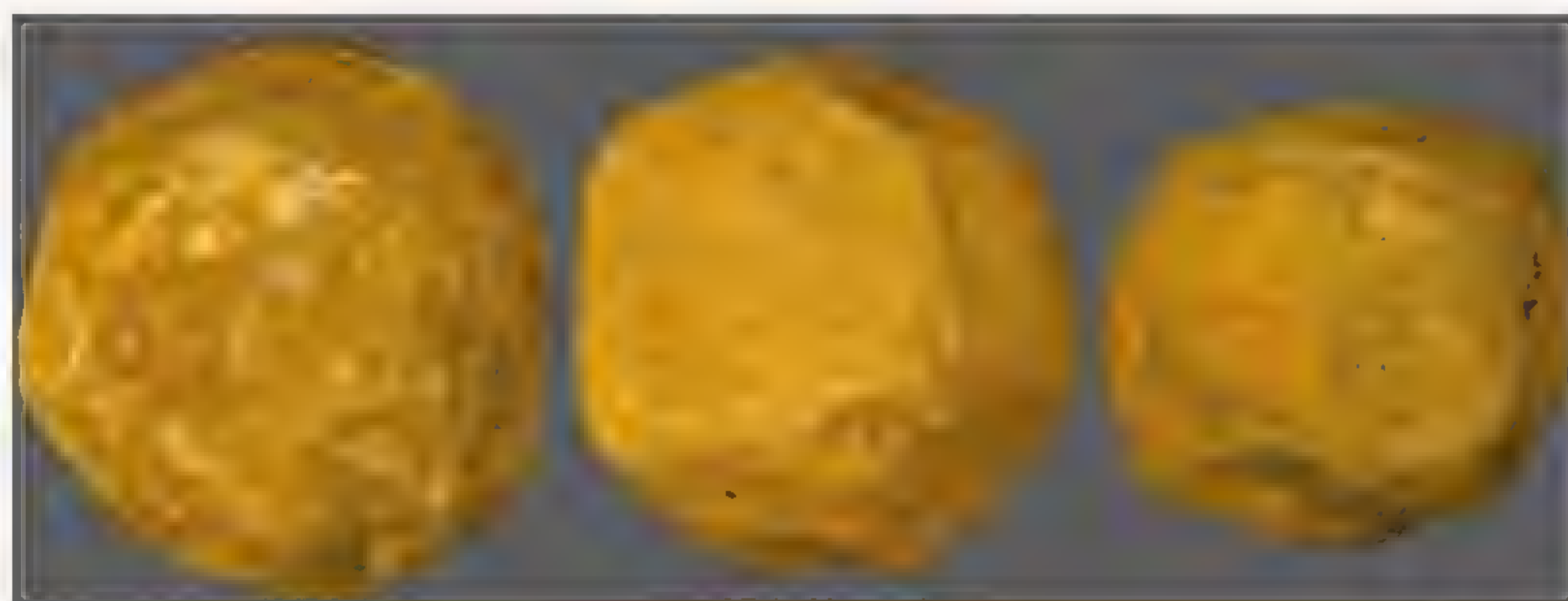
What is common is a process we have come across before (think Mr Pelosi and late-night wellbeing checks): something untoward happens to a member of the political elite; the midwit minions in the elite personage's entourage, fearing public embarrassment, press the cover-up button; the cover-up gets exposed and arouses suspicion; public embarrassment, at least, inevitably follows.

I can't speak for ex-presidential probity; but this would never have happened to the Borgias.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=myIK6iPtZ-k>



PAUL DEVEREUX unearths the latest finds, from mystery stone balls to a thundering dance floor



ABOVE LEFT: Examples of the Ubeidiya mystery stone balls. ABOVE RIGHT: The "specially prepared percussion surface" unearthed in the Andes.

KNOCKING THE EDGES OFF

It seems not any old rock would do for certain ancestral humans (hominins) 1.5 million years ago, according to researchers at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who have been analysing 150 mysterious tennis-ball-sized spheroids uncovered at the Ubeidiya archaeological site in northern Israel. They are crude spheres, being just chunks of rock that have been repeatedly knocked into roughly spherical shape using other rocks as tools. Using three-dimensional analysis to reconstruct the geometry of the stones, the researchers determined that their spherical form was "likely to have been produced intentionally". It is not known to what human lineage the hominins involved belonged to, or why they bashed away so diligently to produce the spheroids. One suggestion has been that they were "attempting to achieve the Platonic ideal of a sphere", essentially, an archetype. Other suggestions have included the features were symbolic, but of what is difficult to ascertain, or perhaps were used as projectiles, but with the deliberate work that went into them that would be unlikely. As one researcher commented: "We will probably never know the answer". (That's archaeology for you.) But clearly, these hominins at least had the cognitive capacity to try to make spheres. *Hebrew University / Paper: The Royal Society 6 Sept. 2023, "The limestone spheroids of 'Ubeidiya: Intentional imposition of symmetric geometry by early hominins?" DOI:10.1098/rsos.23067*

A NICE SPOT

A project led by University of Leicester PhD student Emma Stockley is using computer landscape modelling to predict where prehistoric stone scatters may be found on Dartmoor, Devon. An example is a rocky, tor-topped hill near the village of Lustleigh. Here, the model correctly predicted an archaeological find of a 'lithic scatter' – over 80 pieces of flint, as it happens, the remains of stone toolmaking in the Mesolithic era,

c.8,000 years ago. (Interestingly, flint isn't native to Dartmoor, so the rocks had to have arrived by human action.) Such locations are places with especially wide, sweeping views – 'viewsheds' as archaeologists sometimes call them – allowing prehistoric hunter-gatherers to scan for roaming prey such as red deer and boar while they chipped happily away at their toolmaking. *Guardian, 30 Aug 2023.*

In another context, identifying viewsheds allows us to discern how the landscape was visually used when people in prehistory were siting their sacred monuments, as this columnist and Jon Wozencroft showed in their Royal College of Art study of the source area of the Stonehenge bluestones on the Preseli Hills of South Wales. 'Stone Age Eyes and Ears: A Visual and Acoustic Pilot Study of Carn Menyn and Environs, Preseli, Wales', *Time and Mind vol. 7:1, 2014. DOI: 10.1080/1751696X.2013.860278.*

AN EVOLUTIONARY CLOSE CALL

Every human being trails a vast record of DNA that stretches back into the ages – a person's genome. Analysing variations in this can give researchers an insight into ancient populations. Ways of sequencing variations have become ever more sophisticated using increasingly powerful computation. With this and developing a new analytical method they call "FitCoal" (Fast Infinitesimal Time Coalescent) plus using the genomes of 3,154 modern individuals, Chinese researchers have been able to model a million years of evolution divided into periods of months. "Results showed that human ancestors went through a severe population bottleneck... between around 930,000 and 813,000 years ago. The bottleneck lasted for about 117,000 years and brought human ancestors close to extinction", the scientists state in the abstract to their paper, adding: "The decline appears to have coincided with both major climate change and subsequent speciation events." Eventually, the population rebounded (phew!) giving rise to Neanderthal

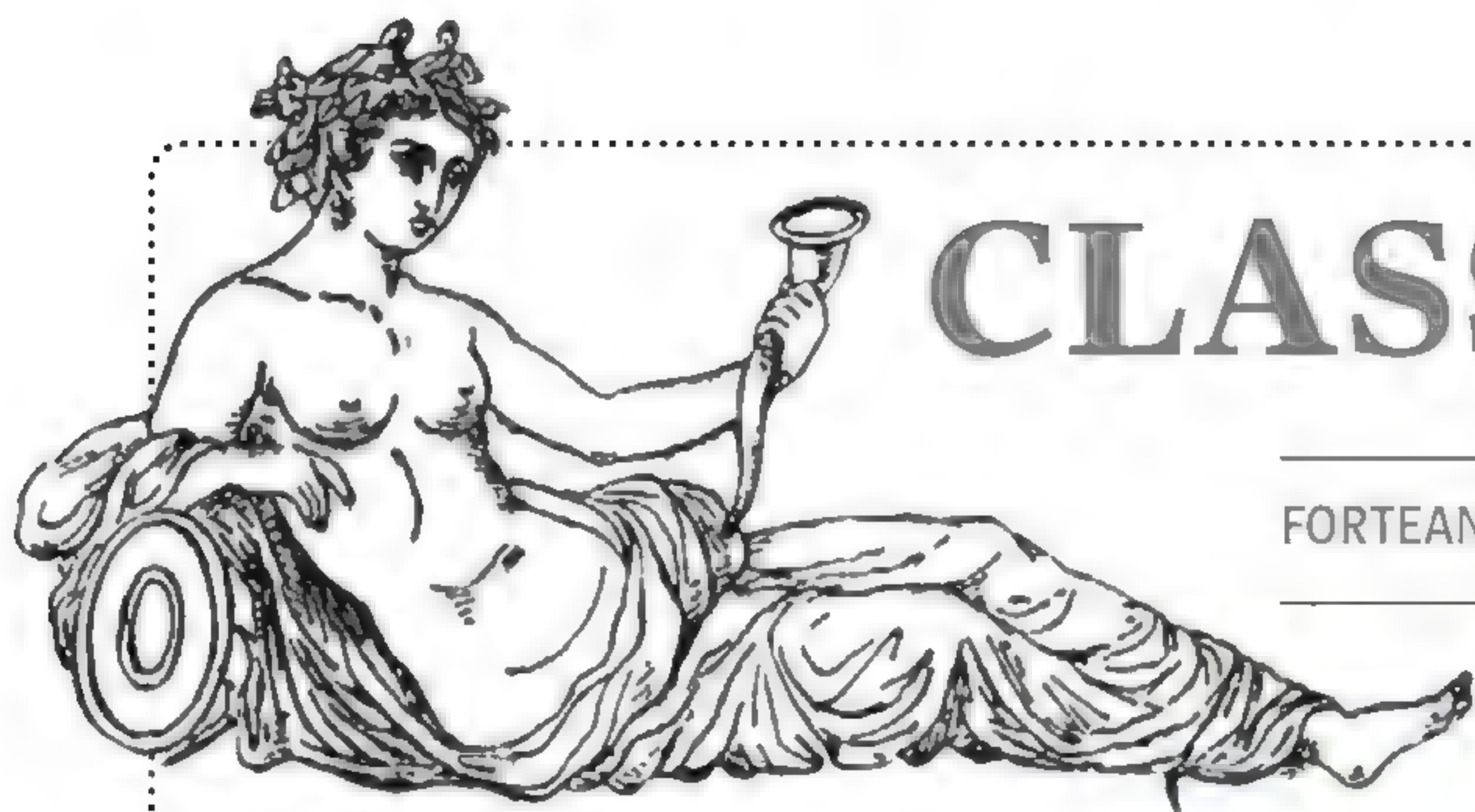
and modern humans. *Science, 31 Aug 2023, vol.381, Issue 6661. DOI: 10.1126/science.abq7487.*

ARRAN'S BIG LITTLE SECRET

Scotland's Isle of Arran is already archaeologically famed for its complex of stone circles on Machrie Moor, but now the remarkable find of a pristine cursus over a kilometre in length and 50m (165ft) wide is causing great excitement. A 'cursus' is a mysterious type of Neolithic linear earthen monument, defined by twin banks. Such monuments can sometimes stretch for kilometres. Having usually been ploughed out or otherwise reduced, thus leaving little or no surface traces in most cases, their discovery has been mainly by aerial photography, in which cursus crop marks can look like ruler lines drawn on the landscape. They often link to earthen barrows, but in themselves show no distinctive recurring internal features. Their purpose is presumably ceremonial, but is not clearly understood. So to uncover fairly intact cursus with still-extant banks is rare indeed.

THUNDER HEELS

A curious pre-hispanic (AD 1000-1532) platform has been discovered at 3,600 ft (1,080m) altitude in the Andes at the site of Viejo Sangayaico. Its floor was carefully composed of different soils, ashes, and camelid guano. It was, says researcher Kevin Lane, a "specially prepared percussion surface" forming, in his analysis, a 'sprung' sounding platform for stomp-style dancing: when people stamp on this special surface it produces a deep, rumbling, thunder-like sound. Lane surmises that it was used as part of rituals worshipping a thunder/lightning god associated with the local mountain, which ethnological history of the indigenous peoples there tends to support. The platform seems to have been used into the Inca period. *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology 71: "Pounding the Ground for the Thunder God", Sept. 2023.*



CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

289: BIBLICAL BOLLOCKS

According to Jim Steinmeyer's biography (pp20-1), the young Fort was equally sceptical of religious and scientific explanations for anything. Later, in *Wild Talents* (Books, p965), on the subject of mysteriously appearing messages, he wrote:

"Or *The Handwriting on the Wall* – and why don't I come out frankly in favor of all, or anyway a goodly number of, the yarns, or the data, of the Bible? *The Defender of Some of the Faith* is clearly becoming my title... To me, the Bible is folklore, and therefore is not pure fantasy, but comprises much that will be rehabilitated. But also to me the Bible is non-existent."

By this last sentence he meant that it, as all other pre-1800 sources, would be excluded from his investigations, finally remarking: "At present, there is too much history."

As every Classical Corner shows, he missed much good and pertinent stuff. He would surely have had a ball with the following.

On 24 November 1977, in Nottingham, John Mortimer (creator of Rumpole, stalwart opponent of censorship) defended the word 'Bollocks' on the cover of the Sex Pistols' album (*What's an album, Dad?*) *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's The Sex Pistols*. Local record seller Christopher Seals had been arrested by WPC Julie Storey for not covering up the word in his window display.

Along with Nottingham English Professor James Kingsley (a former priest), Mortimer showed that the offending word actually occurs in early English translations of the Bible; also that there are other testicular scriptural passages concealed under the archaism 'stones'. Mortimer won the case. Before the verdict was in, Johnny Rotten/John Lydon leaned over and said, "Well, if we lose, we'll rename the album *Never Mind The Stones, Here's the Sex Pistols*" – clear case of taking the Mick...

Key text is Leviticus 22.24, rendered thus in Wycliffe's 1382 version: "Al beeste, that... kitt and taken away the ballokes is, ye shulen not offer to the Lord."

Compare the King James (still beats all modern ones for the glories of its language) offering: "Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which is bruised, or crushed, or broken, or cut."

Here, the balls seem to be in the other court.

NEVER MIND THE BOLLOCKS

HERE'S THE

SEX PISTOLS

Parallel passage Deuteronomy 23.1 reads (KJV): "He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord." You have to wonder how many Israelite men were thus emasculated and in what circumstances?

Job 40.17 also has food for thought: "He moveth his tail like a cedar: the sinews of his stones are wrapped together" – by history's first-recorded Jock Strap..?

A little later (25.11-12), Deuteronomy comes up with this strange paradigm: "When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draws near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets: Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her."

Clearly, the would-be saviour wife has her erotic priorities. So does Ezekiel 23.20-21 in its imagistic denunciation of certain wicked cities. As often, the KJV is euphemistic: "For she doted upon their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses."

The blunter New English Bible gives us: "She lusted after their genitals as large as those of donkeys, and their seminal emission was as strong as that of stallions."

Biblical emissions inevitably evoke Onan, often cited as history's earliest-known wanker. However, Genesis 38.8-10 can be read to suggest it was a case of *coitus interruptus*. Either way, those many Brits said to name their pet budgies Onan need not be disturbed.

Prepuces are another obsessive topic. Witness this extract (somewhat abbreviated for spatial reasons) from 1 Samuel 18.25-27: "And Saul said, Thus

shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies... David and his men slew of the Philistines two hundred men, and brought their foreskins and gave them in full tale to the king..."

I wouldn't have cared to be on foreskin detail.

Exodus 4.24-25 purveys a more lurid soap opera moment: "And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the Lord met him and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah [sc. wife of Moses] took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me."

And, a bloody god too – ouch.

Being no enemy to digression, I close by moving north on the anatomical scale with this tantalising tale from 2 Kings 2.23-24: "And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them."

Speaking as one who has to pay his hairdresser a finder's fee, *The Little Buggers Deserved It*. Any particular reason why the bears should be female? And how common were ursine in this part of the world? None in modern Israel, though the Syrian brown bear is considered an ancient possibility.

Or simply another of Jehovah's tricks? Either way, we're better off with urban foxes.

I'm hoping to get help on this biblical macabre from *FT*'s man of the cloth, Rev. Peter Laws...



Meteoric mysteries

It came from another world – but which one? asks DAVID HAMBLING

NASA / JSC / STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Where do meteorites come from? The French Academy of Sciences once refused to examine meteorites, on the seemingly logical grounds that since there were no stones in the sky it was impossible that any should fall. The Academy damned meteorites as fake news, in the same class as falls of fish or frogs, until a fall of thousands of meteorite fragments in L'Aigle witnessed by many observers in 1803 (**FT143:34-38**). These days science is slightly more sophisticated, but meteorites are still a matter of mystery and debate.

Generally speaking, meteorites are recognised by their melted exterior, known as fusion crust, formed by the heat of entering the Earth's atmosphere. Meteorites can be metallic, stony, or a combination of the two. However, not all rocks with a melted appearance are meteorites. Some turn out to have an earthly origin, known in the business as "meteor-wrongs". These can include slag from industrial processes and volcanic rocks. Many supposed iron meteorites turn out to be man-made.

Chemical analysis separates out the real from the impostors as the mixtures of elements and isotopes involved can uniquely identify a sample and reveal its extraterrestrial origin.

Tektites are an in-between category: they fall from the sky, but are not meteorites. Usually no more than a few centimetres across, tektites are streamlined blobs of glass, formed from superheated material thrown up by meteorite impacts.

Most meteorites can be traced back to the asteroid belt, a region between Mars and Jupiter filled with small worldlets. Some astronomers describe the asteroid belt as a failed planet, in which material failed to cohere into a single body. However, given that we have no direct knowledge of the chemical composition of the asteroid belt, some of the identifications are speculative. This may be helped by NASA's Osiris-Rex mission to collect a sample of an asteroid and return with it to Earth, due to splash down in late September.

One class of meteorites can be traced to a definite origin. Known as lunar meteorites, these are rocks which have been ejected from the Moon by bigger meteorite impacts. Comparisons with Moon rocks, brought back by the American Apollo and Soviet Luna missions, even allow us to identify with some confidence the area they come from – some from the flat mare regions, some from the lunar highlands.



Meteorites are the most accessible form of space travel, a way for us to touch other worlds

There are only a couple of kilos of lunar meteorites, but a hundred times as much from Mars. Martian meteorites tend to be identified by a mineral called Maskelynite formed by shock and pressure which sparkles in sunlight but shows black in polarised light. Its presence is not definitive, but a good indication of Martian material.

Of the 200 or so known Martian meteorites, ALH84001 is the most famous. Discovered in the Antarctic in 1984, this stony meteorite made headlines when NASA scientists claimed that it contained microscopic fossils, evidence of life on Mars in the distant past (**FT92:10**).

The supposed fossils were tiny, smaller than any bacteria known at the time, and other researchers suggested a non-biological origin. The argument has never been fully resolved, and the original authors still maintain that ALH84001 contains Martian fossils. The scientific consensus, though, is that nothing categorically points to a biological explanation and the case is unproven.

Another space traveller known as NWA13188 proved to have an unexpected origin. Found in Morocco, this golf-ball-sized stone had the fusion crust and other features of a meteorite, but chemical analysis showed that it matched terrestrial rocks, suggesting that it was one of those confusing meteor-wrongs. Analysis of the isotopic composition showed it had been exposed to radiation for a prolonged period, generally a reliable sign of thousands of years spent in space.

LEFT: The famed meteorite ALH84001.

Researchers now believe that NWA13188 was ejected from Earth tens of thousands of years ago, either by a volcanic eruption or by meteorite impact, and was blasted into orbit for a considerable period before eventually falling back to Earth. Investigations are continuing and the matter has not yet been settled, but it seems to be a kind of super-tektite.

IF NWA13188 is our most local meteorite, then the furthest travelled might be the collection of fragments known as IM1, for "Interstellar Meteorite 1".

In January 2014 a space rock weighing perhaps a ton exploded above the Pacific Ocean. Analysis by NASA and the Pentagon indicated that the meteorite came from an 'unbound hyperbolic orbit,' meaning that it came not from the asteroid belt or even Mars, but from the depth of interstellar space. This is one of only three objects known to have come from outside the Solar System, one of the others being the asteroid 'Oumuamua which passed by in 2017 (**FT362:24, 363:13, 393:23, 397:22-23, 404:14**).

A team led by Avi Loeb, former chair of the Harvard Astronomy Department, dragged the ocean floor in the impact area off Papua New Guinea with a magnetic sled. The expedition was funded by a cryptocurrency entrepreneur and Loeb came back with dozens of tiny metallic spherules less than a millimetre across. He claims these are the remains of the first interstellar meteorite.

Other scientists challenged Loeb's claim, noting that the speed of the meteorite was travelling – over 50km a second, or over 100,000 mph – would have vaporised it into 'aerosol-sized' fragments far smaller than Loeb's spherules. No debris has ever been recovered from a meteorite fireball before.

Loeb is used to controversy, not least for suggesting that 'Oumuamua was an alien spaceship, and is sticking by his claims. He is also fighting off the government of Papua New Guinea, as his team may not have had the necessary permits for retrieving material from the seabed.

Meteorites are the most accessible form of space travel, a way for us earthlings to touch other worlds. They are visitors from the unknown, and as such they will continue to inspire scientific controversy.

For recent meteorite news, see **FT413:24-25, 428:8-9, 435:6-7**.



MEXICO'S ANCIENT ALIENS | Mexican UFO pundit unveils yet more extraterrestrial corpses and incredible claims

Following the recent US congressional hearing (FT436:28-31) on UAP (unidentified anomalous/aerial phenomena), the Mexican Congress also held a hearing to explore what their government knows about the subject. It was initiated by Sergio Gutiérrez Luna, a deputy of Morena, Mexico's governing party, after being approached by Mexican UFO journalist Jaime Maussan. Gutiérrez began the session by getting participants to stand up and swear to tell the truth, after which attendees were then shown footage of UAPs, including shots captured by a fighter jet showing lights floating above the clouds, and given presentations by Maussan, US Navy pilot Ryan Graves, and Robert Salas, a retired USAF lieutenant. Harvard Astronomer Avi Loeb, who runs the Galileo Project, searching for extraterrestrial intelligence (FT410:30, 412:6-7), also appeared via video link.

Maussan caused a stir by revealing what he said were the bodies of two extraterrestrials, which he displayed to the audience in coffin-like cases. He claimed that the tiny bodies, with long necks, tapering heads and three fingers on each hand, somewhat reminiscent of E.T. from the Spielberg film, were discovered in Cuzco, Peru, in 2017. "They were found in diatom (algæ) mines and subsequently became fossilised," he explained, adding that carbon dating by Mexico's National Autonomous University (UNAM) had shown them to be about 1,000 years old. He also said that the university found that almost a third of their DNA is "unknown" and the specimens were not part of "our terrestrial evolution". He then presented X-rays that he claimed showed one had "eggs" inside and also said that they had implants made of the rare metals cadmium and osmium. Maussan explained that the supposed extraterrestrials were not mummies, but "whole, complete, bodies" that "have not been manipulated inside and that have



ABOVE: The alleged 1,000-year-old alien bodies on display in Mexico.

a series of elements that make them truly extraordinary." Their preservation, he said, was due to the diatoms that coat them, which prevent the growth of bacteria or fungi.

While the announcement caused a stir in UFO circles, it was met with a considerable degree of scepticism elsewhere, even among other participants in the event. Ryan Graves expressed his disappointment and described the event as "a huge step backwards" and an "unsubstantiated stunt". Immediately afterwards Julieta Fierro from UNAM stated that the university had not endorsed Maussan's claims and that his data "made no sense". UNAM also published a statement about their dating study, saying that "under no circumstances do we draw conclusions about the origin of these samples" and "any information implying... involvement in any activity other than Carbon 14 dating

is completely invalid." It also refused to say how old its study had found the samples to be. However, Fierro blasted the whole presentation, saying, "It would have been good to invite scientists, both those who search for extraterrestrial life, as well as people who do genetic anthropology and who date remains from the past, but they were not included," adding, "Not only that, they should also have invited the Peruvian ambassador. You can imagine what it means to display 'extraterrestrials' unearthed in that country and bring them to Mexico, and not invite representatives from Peru: it's terrible. How did they get through customs? Besides, if they were aliens, the first thing you should do is to isolate them. Because what if it brings a virus from somewhere else and causes a terrible pandemic?"

The Paleo DNA laboratory at Lakehead University, Canada, also issued a statement, saying

DNA samples taken from one of the specimens that they had tested were found to be 100 per cent human. The Peruvian World Congress on Mummy Studies condemned the bodies as a hoax made from human remains and demanded an official inquiry into whether archaeological crimes had been committed, while Peruvian Culture Minister Leslie Urteaga said no scientific institution in her country had identified the remains as non-human. She questioned how the specimens had left Peru, saying: "There is a criminal complaint from the Ministry of Culture against some people who had a relationship with these gentlemen," referring to Maussan and his colleagues, and adding, "I am going to ask for information to see what has happened... because I understand they are part of pre-Hispanic bone remains."

Others pointed to Maussan's long track record of endorsing and promoting UFO discoveries that have turned out to be misrepresentations, hoaxes and frauds, particularly his presentation of another "alien corpse" in 2015 that was found to be the modified mummy of an indigenous child, again from Peru (FT326:26, 329:26-27). He also presented an "alien corpse", very similar to those shown in Mexico, to the Peruvian Congress in 2018, which was subsequently shown to be made from a mixture of animal and modified human remains, probably from another indigenous child mummy. Avi Loeb urged Maussan to make the "aliens" available for wider scientific study, while David Spergel, former head of Princeton University's astrophysics department and chair of the recent NASA UAP report, said: "If you have something strange, make samples available to the world's scientific community, and we'll see what's there." *codigoculto.com*, 27 Nov 2018; *washingtonpost.com*, *dailymail.co.uk*, *huffpost.com*, 13 Sept; *wired.com*, *independent.co.uk*, 14 Sept; [R] 15 Sept 2023.

SPECIAL REPORT

SECRETS AND LIES: THE MOD, UFOs AND UAP

DAVID CLARKE provides an exclusive behind-the-scenes look at the UK's input to the Pentagon's UAP task force and the equally mysterious loss of the Condign report.

The summer of 2023 may mark the highpoint of a renewed resurgence of interest in UFOs both in the corridors of the Pentagon and for the world's media. But all the fevered online debate around whistleblowers and imminent disclosure obscures the fact that, whatever the latest claims from the USA, UAP are a global phenomenon.

So far, the response of the UK Government to US intelligence interest and NASA's separate, ongoing study, has been muted. The official line is that MoD closed its UFO desk in 2009 after some 50 years acting as the focal point for sightings reported by members of the public (FT304:28-29). This followed the transfer of its surviving files to The National Archives, a process for which I acted as consultant. If you believe MoD's boilerplate responses to recent FOI requests, our Government has no further interest in the phenomenon.

But as Prime Minister Harold Macmillan *may* have once said, "events, dear boy, events" have a habit of changing game plans. In July 2021, after the US Director of National Intelligence released its second 'preliminary assessment' of UAP, Lord Aamer Sarfraz put the UK MoD on the spot during a mini-debate in the House of Lords. The Conservative peer, who sits on the National Committee of the Joint Security Strategy, wanted to know if as a result of the change in US policy the MoD planned to reopen its UAP investigations and what data it held.

Responding for the Government, Baroness Goldie said MoD "have no opinion on the existence of extraterrestrial life and we no longer investigate reports of sightings of unidentified aerial phenomena."

She admitted they were aware of the Pentagon's renewed interest, but had "no plans to conduct our own report into UAP, because in over 50 years no such reporting has indicated the existence of any military threat to the UK."

As with all parliamentary statements the real interest lies not in what was said, but in what was *not* said. There are no plans to produce a new UK UAP report but that does not mean those operating the UK air defence system are not actively monitoring or collecting UAP reports from military sources. Evidently they still are, as Goldie went on to say MoD treats incursions of unidentified objects into UK airspace "very seriously". But the MoD's priority is to address "actual threats where those threats are identifiable and can be substantiated" UAP, by definition, are elusive, nebulous phenomena that may or not be solid 'objects' capable of radar detection or conventional interception by fighter aircraft.

But is the 'no interest' response provided in Parliament and in response to numerous FOI requests the truth? I believe we should remain sceptical as the MoD provided similar stark denials two decades ago while a defence contractor was working on a computerised study of the MoD's UAP data. The report he produced, codenamed Project Condign, completed in 2000 (FT211:4-6) was itself commissioned in the mid-1990s in direct response to an earlier period of intense media and political interest in UAP.

The MoD's stonewalling backfired in May when Dr Sean Kirkpatrick, head of the US UAP Taskforce, addressed NASA's public hearing on UAPs. When quizzed on how the twin inquiries were partnering with international agencies,



ABOVE: The UK Ministry of Defence no longer investigates UAP sightings.

How is the UK going to share data on UAPs if it has closed its UAP reporting network?

Kirkpatrick revealed he had recently attended "our first Five Eyes forum on the subject". The Five Eyes Alliance is a secretive global information-sharing network that includes intelligence agencies from the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. It was created during the first Cold War and one of the four UK agencies that share information with the US agencies is Defence Intelligence. DI's interest in UFOs dates to 1950-51 when their Flying Saucer Working Party report was prepared with the blessing of the CIA and later used to brief Winston Churchill (FT372:32-39).

Despite media pressure, the MoD refuse to be drawn on their contribution to the Five Eyes forum, but Kirkpatrick revealed the US agencies had entered into discussions with their partners, including the UK on sharing UAP data. The Canadians, in the meantime,

have set up their own UAP study group after two mysterious objects were shot down over their territory earlier this year. Kirkpatrick said the topics discussed at the forum meeting included: "How do they do reporting? What kind of analysis can they help us with? What kind of calibration can they help us with? What can we help them with?" He said they were "establishing all of that right now *and they're going to end up sending their information and data to us* [my emphasis] to feed into the process."

Kirkpatrick's revelations begs the question: precisely *how* is the UK going to share data on UAPs if it has closed its UAP reporting network? It is common knowledge that the defunct UFO desk never had the resources to conduct field investigations or analysis of the largely low-quality sighting reports it received on a daily basis from the public. Its closure was followed by the cancellation of standing orders to police forces and the Civil Aviation Authority that had since the mid-1960s routinely channelled sighting reports to the MoD.



But files at The National Archives reveal that since 1967 DI55, a branch of the Defence Intelligence Staff, had been the lead UK agency responsible for investigation of UFO incidents categorised as potential threats to defence (FT228:32-33). These were primarily reports from members of the armed forces or radar stations. But occasionally DI55 followed up photographs received from civilians as in the images taken in Calvine, Scotland, that appear to show a black project aircraft shadowed by a Harrier jet (FT423:30-35). DI55's primary mission was the technical assessment of aerodynamic missiles that might pose a threat to the UK's armed forces. As UFOs were regarded as 'unidentified' and 'flying' by default they fell within DI55's remit – albeit mainly as a time-consuming side-task that involved reviewing paperwork copied to them from the UFO desk.

Significantly it was DI55 who decided during the 1990s to replace UFO with the acronym UAP that is routinely used by US intelligence agencies.. At that time, the acronym referred to 'unidentified aerial phenomena' but last year, shortly after the NASA study was initiated, the US Congress redefined UAP as 'unidentified anomalous phenomena'. Declassified files reveal the British intelligence adoption of UAP as opposed to UFO was part of a strategy to evade the public spotlight and evade further entanglement in a problem that had brought unwelcome attention to their main espionage activities targeting Russia and China.

According to the paper trail, DI55's investigations ended in December 2000 when British Aerospace contractor Ron Haddow completed his hefty three volume *UAPs in the UK Air Defence Region*. Nicknamed 'the Condign report', the study book-ended the half-century between the Flying Saucer Working Party report. In contrast to the authors of that earlier report, Haddow had access to a computer

database populated with two decades of sighting data. That allowed him to scrutinise several thousand incidents logged both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The Condign report pre-empted the current US inquiries and states bluntly that UAP *do exist*. But Haddow concluded they are a type of rare natural phenomena that include ball lightning and atmospheric plasmas, despite a complete lack of scientific input. His main recommendation, that had been decided before the study began, was that UAP were no threat to the defence of the UK and should therefore be deleted from DI55's list of tasks. Haddow has never spoken publicly about his work on UAP for the British Government and the MoD have gone to great lengths to conceal his identity.

When I became aware of the existence of his report in 2005, I used the new Freedom of Information Act to secure its release. At the time it was classified Secret/UK Eyes Only and the process of declassification took almost 18 months to complete. Redacted versions of the three volumes and executive summary were uploaded to the MoD's website in 2007. Large sections of volume 3 were deleted from the version released to the public. Examination of textual clues and further paragraphs freed from redactions following an appeal to the Information Commissioner reveal what lay behind the 'sensitive' sections. These cover visits to the UK by black project aircraft, the limitations of UK air defence radars when used to detect UAP and information supplied in confidence by the US intelligence community.

It would seem obvious that any sharing of intelligence on UAPs between the US and UK would depend upon access to Haddow's report and the computer database that was used to generate its conclusions. But what became of the unredacted original version?

Five years ago I was told

the report would be reviewed in 2020 prior to its transfer to The National Archives. But one year later ufologist Matthew Illsley dropped a bombshell. He submitted a FOI asking for it to be reviewed for release. But he was told a search had drawn a blank and inquiries had established that it had been 'accidentally destroyed' while being photocopied! News of this careless blunder arrived as, across the Atlantic, the US Task Force was in the process of upgrading the UAP reporting procedure and reopening the Pentagon's UFO archive.

As a direct result of our concern MoD ordered further searches of the Defence Intelligence archives and an investigation of the circumstances of its loss. In the process it emerged that searches were stymied by the fact that DI55 no longer existed. The unit once described by a tabloid as "our secret army against the aliens" vanished in the early noughties during a massive cost-cutting exercise that followed the so-called Strategic Defence Review implemented from 1998 under Tony Blair's Government. Its former responsibilities, including aerodynamic missiles and threats from foreign aircraft and drones, are now split between two or more sections in the alphabet soup of surviving Defence Intelligence branches.

According to my sources, those who have inherited DI55's remit have no interest in UAPs and have "washed their hands of the entire subject". With ever-decreasing budgets and staffing, no one in the MoD management treats the subject as a priority issue – in stark contrast with their partners in North America. The inertia and complacency that replaced the enthusiasm of the 1990s is blatantly illustrated by the lack of interest they displayed when alerted to the loss of the Condign report.

But I can reveal that all is not lost. Shortly before FT went to press the MoD contacted me with some surprising cheery news. Their investigation had carried out further searches

of what they call "legacy information systems and their local physical record holdings" – in plain English, paper files that had been overlooked in earlier keyword searches of computer databases.

The result? "[We] can now happily report that after these exhaustive searches, a full unredacted copy of the original Project Condign Report has been located. The report is classified SECRET [but] as part of our Public Record Act obligations, we will be conducting a review of this record to determine if any personal or defence capability sensitivities remain."

This process will inevitably lead to fresh redactions before its eventual transfer to The National Archives. But if, as I suspect, the original report contains the Calvine UFO photographs, its release may throw new light on that unsolved mystery.

One further victory for openness and transparency emerged from my own successful FOI request to The National Archives for the opening of the existing redacted version of the Condign report on their public catalogue. Even though a version had been available online since 2006, the archives were obliged to once again submit my request to the MoD. After a public interest test that took eight months to complete, my request was approved by the Secretary of State for Digital Culture, Media and Sport, Michelle Donelan. In the end, my "arguments made in favour of disclosure" had won the day: "The Ministry of Defence believes in open and transparent government, and there is an assumption in favour of public access... this is particularly the case in relation to topics of heightened public interest, such as the study of unidentified flying objects."

The redacted version of UAPs in the UK Air Defence Region (The Condign report) can be downloaded for a small fee from www.nationalarchives.gov.uk by searching for DEFE 24/3356 UFO Policy 2000.



Haunted Britain

ALAN MURDIE hits the road armed with a classic guide to the nation's most mysterious sites

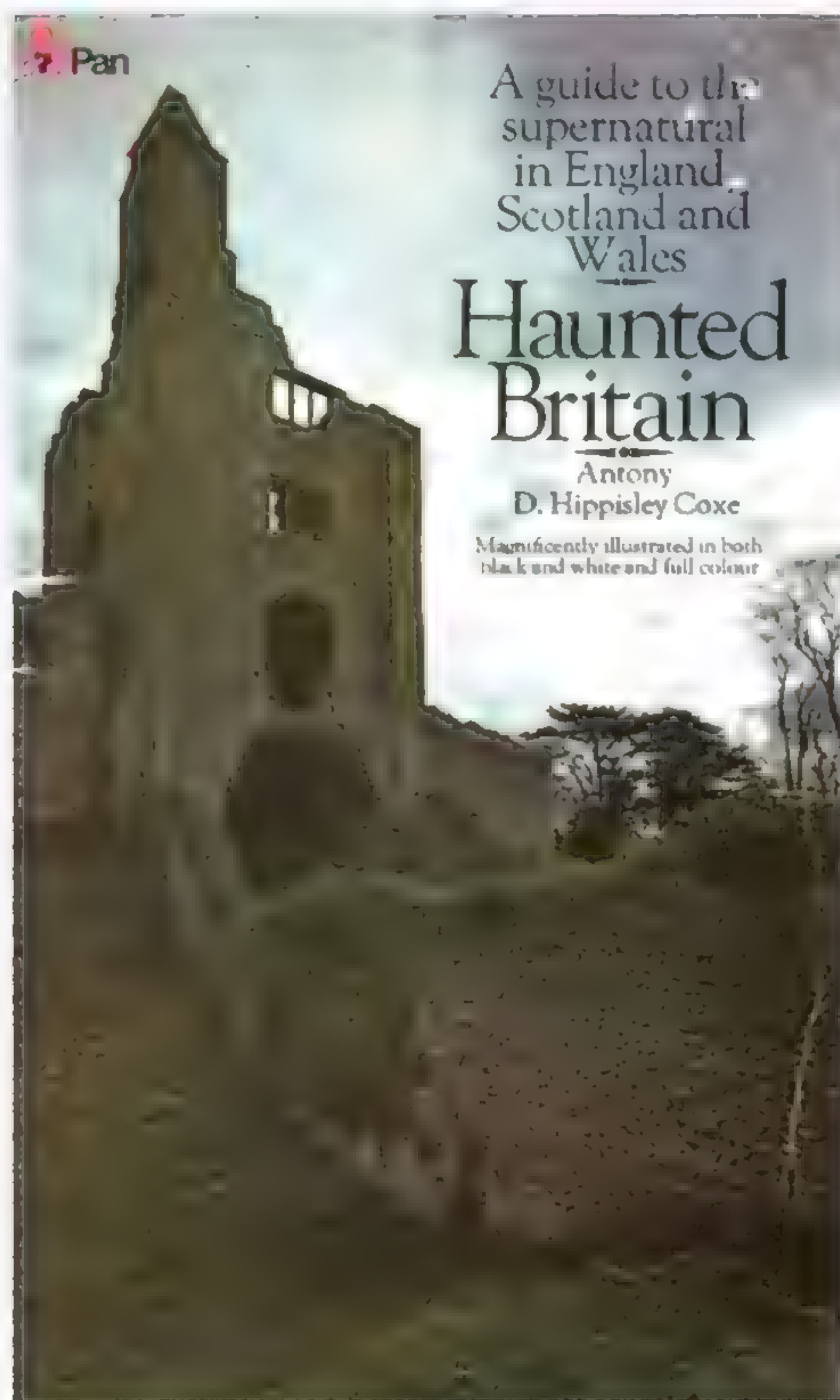
Back in January 2023, *Fortean Times* marked the 50th anniversary of the classic Reader's Digest *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Great Britain* (1973), celebrating its influence and the lasting fascination this work still holds for many who first read it in their younger days (FT427:28-35).

The year 1973 also saw the publication of another book on similar themes which, though smaller and written by just one author, bears comparison in its lasting influence on ghost hunters and the imagination of young readers. This was *Haunted Britain* by Antony Hippisley Coxe (1912-1988), a long-standing favourite of mine and a work which helped inspire my own early interest in ghosts and folklore. If I had to select one book providing a guide for purely exploring haunted places around Britain, it would certainly be the one I would still pick.

My first copy was the softback edition purchased for my 12th birthday. I regularly read and re-read it thereafter, until it deteriorated and came apart some 25 years later. Fortunately, I soon secured a replacement copy and it still remains a cherished favourite, an essential *vede mecum* or "handbook or guide that is kept constantly at hand for consultation".

Described by its author as a "guidebook to places about which people hold some strange belief", *Haunted Britain* is designed to accompany travellers and seekers of "the off-beat and the eerie". Details of over a thousand mysterious sites and their stories, legends and superstitions are packed into its pages with directions for reaching them. Some sites are works of nature, remote peaks, caves, crags and tors or isolated pools and rocks. Others are the handiwork of man, including megalithic circles, stone and earthwork castles, antique manors, magnificent and despoiled churches, curious follies, grandiose and also truly humble graves and neglected nooks and corners of obscure village fields.

After clarifying that when describing a site as "haunted", he means allegedly or reputedly haunted, Hippisley Coxe takes the reader on a series of marathon haunted road-trips. We are taken not only to uncanny places but also to strange



LEFT: The paperback edition of *Haunted Britain*, a mainstay of many a 1970s fortean library. BOTTOM LEFT: The seven categories of haunted places and their evocative symbols.

moments in time, with some locations selected for the occurrence of bizarre one-off and inexplicable incidents. Every stop is awarded a symbol representing one of seven categories – a skull for haunting; a star for a sacred site or holy well; a cauldron and wand for witchcraft; a mermaid for half-human creatures, fairies or fabulous animals (e.g. black dogs); a heraldic winged stallion for legends (including Arthurian); a weird circular design for interesting customs and a spade for buried treasure.

Haunted Britain guarantees the reader an inspirational range of prospective places to visit wherever he or she may live or venture to, arranged on a county-by-county basis.

The pace of this epic tour never lets up, starting from Cornwall and eventually reaching the north of Scotland and then out to the furthest Scottish Isles, before doubling back and eventually ending in Lothian. The immense variety of material covered and the flowing shifts in location and tempo as we move from place to place imbue the book with a 'stream of consciousness' feel.

The most comprehensive sections cover the sites in the West Country, exploring Cornwall, Devon, Exmoor, Dartmoor and Somerset. All of these lay in close proximity to the author's countryside home, 'Ackworthy' at Hartland near Bideford in Devon. The rest of southern England is then traversed, taking the routes most frequently used by tourists with a strong emphasis on rural areas. Hippisley Coxe was clearly happiest on the road amid the finest scenery and heading away from urban sprawl. Apart from London, Cambridge, York and Edinburgh, most major towns and cities are bypassed, with Birmingham, Bradford, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Norwich, Sheffield and Glasgow receiving no entries at all. The section on Wales as 'the land of wells' maintains a consistently

The book was designed to accompany travellers and seekers of "the off-beat and the eerie"

- ☠ Hauntings, ghosts and poltergeists
- ☆ Holy, healing and wishing wells; sacred magic and mysterious places
- 🪄 Witchcraft, sorcery and curses
- 👁 Spectral and mythical beasts; the Little People
- 🎪 Strange customs and festivals
- 🐉 Legends (including Arthurian) and odd stories
- ⚒ Buried treasure

high standard throughout, but the entries slowly decline in number and detail after crossing the Midlands and heading north. The entire county of Leicestershire receives scant mention, with only three locations dashing the author's hopes it would be crammed with phantom riders and wild hunts. Sites are increasingly separated as the tour heads up the map with the thinnest section being Scotland and its outer islands. But the gems that are included are highly memorable.

Hippisley Coxe belonged to the British tradition of gentlefolk authors and autodidacts that flourished before the 1980s and who enjoyed sufficient self-assurance and creativity to believe they could turn their pens to any subject and write in an informed way. With Hippisley Coxe this was largely true, as prior to *Haunted Britain* he had written entries for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, an experience that helped shape his approach to his material. All ghost books on hauntings in Britain are in some way a collective effort, drawing upon the labours of previous researchers.

In the extensive bibliography he records how "by great good fortune" he was aided in acquiring a copy of Charles Harper's *Haunted Houses, Tales of the Supernatural, with some account of Hereditary Curses and Family Legends* (1907), annotated with notes by Harper himself for a new edition intended for 1936 but never published. Cases from psychical research were also trawled for more up-to-date accounts. He clearly possessed the magpie approach of Charles Fort, with an eye for the stray fact or suggestive detail, and each entry is distilled after reading the different versions of each story available.

Writing in the present tense gives

traditional hauntings an up-to-the-moment sense of immediacy, carrying the implied message that you could be on the way to an encounter yourself; e.g. at Barthomley (Cheshire) "the ghost of the Lady in White haunts the church field", or on the road at Faulkborne (Essex) "the ghost is a gentleman in a billy-cock hat on an old-fashioned bicycle who rides straight towards you at dusk".

Sometimes rather than an identifiable apparition there are indications of intangible and elemental forces at work. He tells us that Great Hound Tor on Dartmoor is "a place which a number of people find unbearable. Some, who have tried to overcome their inexplicable fear have fallen into a trance". Not far away at Burrator, locals shun Crazywell or Classenwell at night "because of a mysterious voice which comes from the middle of the pool and announces the name of the next person in the neighbourhood to die."

Other entries draw upon weird and eccentric incidents in local history, replete with gobbets of folk horror. Thus, at Knaith (Lincolnshire) "a rich widow called Mrs Dog was murdered here for her money. Although her house was pulled down the place is haunted by the Phantom Hound, which has a woman's face", while Dunwood Farm near Weobley Marsh (Herefordshire) has "the ghost of Old Gregg who was poisoned by being given stewed toad for supper".

There is a seemingly unending flow of such intriguing fragments of local tales, superstitions or taboos, often leaving further questions hanging. At times the bones of a story are boiled down to the point of becoming effectively useless, forcing the reader to seek out the original source. What good does it do

to merely learn Baldock in Hertfordshire is haunted by a phantom calf or that a Green Lady haunts Stovehaven in Aberdeenshire without any more precise clues on location? (The Stonehaven site is probably Muchalls Castle.) At other times, one wonders if precise details are deliberately obscured to protect the reader, as with a bothy reputedly standing at Fealaar between the Braemar Hills and the Forest of Atholl, "haunted by a vampire. In the 1920s two poachers experienced the phenomenon and one bore the marks for the rest of his life".

Nonetheless, such defects do not detract from what is an outstanding achievement. Intent on checking every location, together with his wife Araminta (to whom it is dedicated) Hippisley Coxe embarked upon a series of epic journeys. They covered 12,000 miles between 1970 and 1973, managing to visit over 80 per cent of the places and delegating the remainder to local contacts and informants.

Most significantly, his own discoveries and gleanings along the way add to what is known. It is this element of personal revelation which makes the book far more than a mere collection of listings, preventing it from becoming a sonorous recitation of places and phenomena which can even make a subject such as ghosts become stale and dull. His summaries are often a simple condensation of a ghostly report, tale or legend, but time and again they are enlivened with his own shrewd observations, anecdotes or spontaneous reactions. Once sampled, *Haunted Britain* incorporates readily into memory as a result.

At Cerne Abbas he rejoices as young couples still walk hand-in-hand up to the "rude man" hill figure: "Praise be, to Priapus". At Westbury he deplores the "pathetic nag" carved by Mr Gee, obliterating an earlier hill-figure of a savage-looking horse. At Glastonbury he is delighted the Cromwellian soldier responsible for hacking down the Holy Thorn blinded himself with woodchips and cut off his own leg in the process.

Father John at Tavistock School, Devon, describes to him an encounter with "the ghost of Judge Glanville's daughter in a cloak and a hood", one of a long line of people to have seen her. At Stonor Park, Oxfordshire, he records how "Lord Camoys told me of many strange things that have happened here... voices coming from empty rooms and a man's footsteps walking across a floor and down the stairs where a cupboard is mysterious opened", together with dogs seeing something that agitates them and

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ABOVE: Great Hound Tor on Dartmoor, "a place which a number of people find unbearable".



GHOSTWATCH

“an animal smell”.

At Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire, where during certain phases of the Moon, “the shape of a dagger appears on a tombstone” Hippisley Coxe mentions how “Mr Stanley Dove, landlord of the Grosvenor Hotel, remembers keeping a vigil as a boy, and seeing it appear”. At Battle Abbey in Sussex he is pleased to correct the record, finding its owner did not drown as a child in 1907 as the victim of a curse, as reported by a previous ghost book writer (doubtless a relief to her too).

The exposure of such errors leads him to be cautious with the information he gathers, including when making on-the-spot enquiries. He realises he must be on his guard against informants either tending to exaggerate manifestations as a bait for tourists or those playing phenomena down to keep visitors away. He also encounters locals who know nothing (or profess not to) and who give “the sideways look”. Quite possibly, he endured a portion of mockery, curt dismissals and slammed doors, but if so they go unmentioned. Some responses certainly suggest flippancy, as with a gentleman in Campbeltown in Argyll who, when asked if the grim-looking Sadell Abbey is haunted by monks, replies: “I’m nae sure aboot monks, but giants and beasties sairtainly!” One rather suspects a leg-pull here (this was 1973 after all).

Ultimately, what emerges for the reader is a comprehensive exploration of almost the entirety of Britain (only Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands are omitted) in the form of a pilgrimage or a quest, one that can be followed mentally. It helps that Hippisley Coxe remains open-minded throughout, while admitting: “I am not conscious of ever having seen or heard a ghost myself.” As to what ghosts may be, he leans towards the ‘psychic field’ theories of dowser TC Lethbridge and thinks that time itself is more fluid than we perceive and not subject to the artificial barriers humans impose upon it.

And occasionally some first-hand proof arrives, as when in 1971 at Court Farm, Hanham Abbots, Gloucestershire, Araminta follows a man into a barn to ask directions only to find it completely empty.

Also noticeable is his keenness in seeking out healing wells and springs, and meticulously listing the symptoms each is reputed to relieve or cure. He is impressed by the atmosphere on an island in Loch Maree (Ross-shire) with its holy well and a wishing tree in which people impress copper coins into the trunk, and greatly moved by the sight of thousands of strips of cloth and rags hung up as offerings for good fortune at the Cloutie Well (Ross and Cromarty) “one of the most vivid examples of belief I have yet come across”.



DAVE CONNER / FLICKR / CREATIVE COMMONS



BOOTHBY099 / CREATIVE COMMONS

TOP: Thousands of strips of cloth and rags hung up as offerings for good fortune at the Cloutie Well.
ABOVE: Copper coins impressed into the trunk of the wishing tree on an island in Loch Maree.



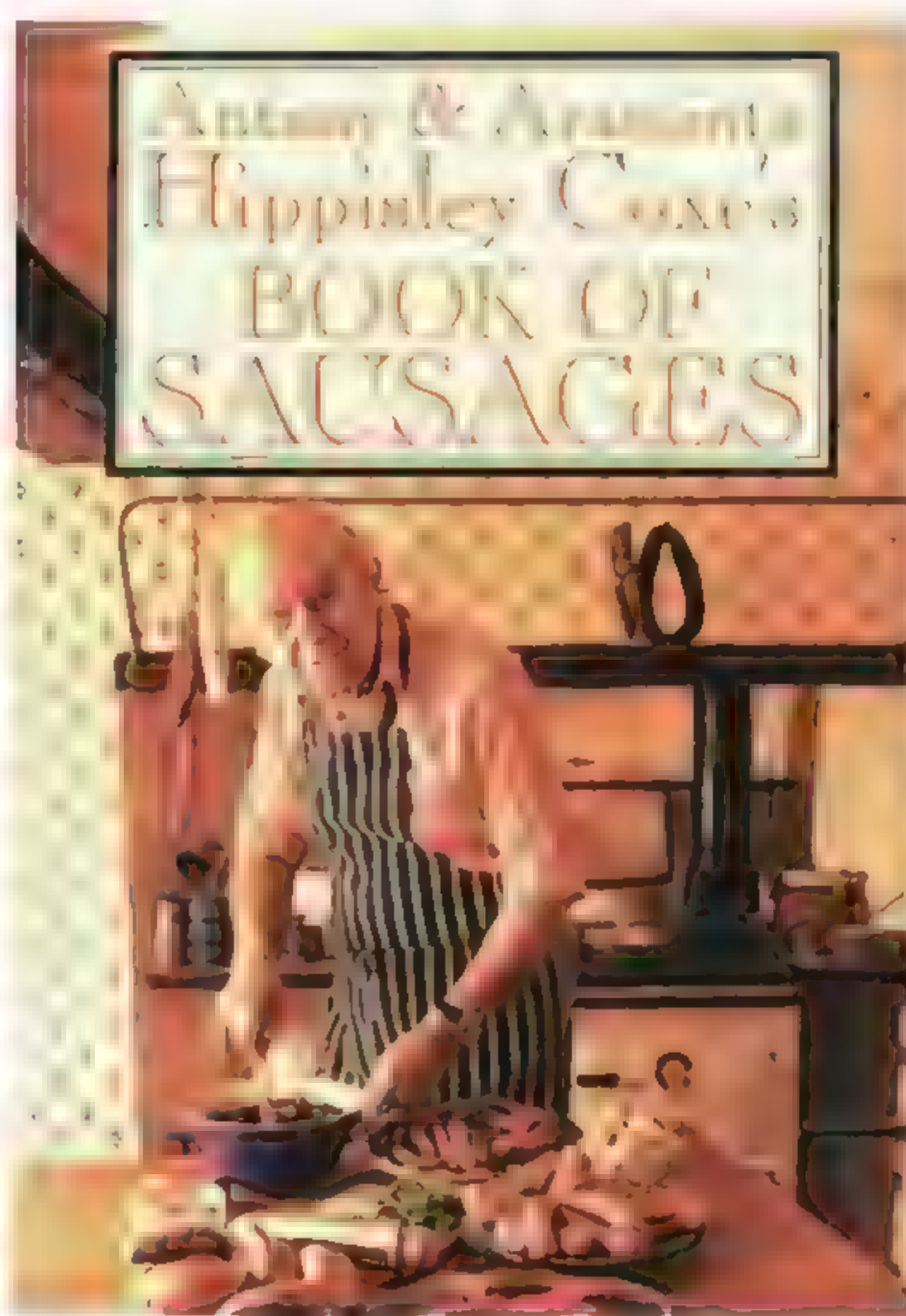
ABOVE LEFT & RIGHT: Evocative photographs were a part of the book's appeal, as with these examples of Downe Court Manor and the Screaming Skull of Bettiscombe. **BELOW:** Anthony and Araminta were fascinated by sausages as well as spectres and wrote many books on non-ghostly subjects.

Well received at the time, *Haunted Britain* went through several editions and was hailed by other ghost book authors such as Peter Underwood and Andrew Green.

A major part of the appeal of the book also comes from its attractive and evocative photographs, which succeed brilliantly in capturing and expressing the atmosphere and eeriness of many sites. Though empty of human figures, the pictures present us with locations that nonetheless carry the sense of a presence or an impression of something just evading the lens of the camera, causing them to resonate in our imaginations.

After *Haunted Britain* appeared, Hippisley Coxe was regularly contacted by researchers seeking further information and details of his original sources, the data on each site having been entered by him into voluminous card index system. But unfortunately, as he regretted in a letter to Ghost Club chairman Tom Perrott in 1985, he then used the backs of these cards again for recording material for another book and inadvertently dumped them all afterwards.

In correspondence Hippisley Coxe also confided that he had been compiling a book, *Ghosts and Animals*, only to abandon it upon learning that Dennis Bardens was bringing out the title *Psychic Animals* (1987). His later postcards and letters to Perrott also mention increasingly serious medical conditions afflicting himself and Araminta (some perhaps were long-standing, judging by the interest in the healing properties of holy wells, so apparent in *Haunted Britain*). In a letter dated 2 December 1987 he expressed



regret these medical conditions had driven them to sell their home of 30 years at Hartland, and they were now struggling to find a more convenient place to live in the New Year. Then in January 1988 he died suddenly. An obituary in the *Independent* (28 Jan 1988) hailed him as an expert on the history of the circus and on sausages, having produced a guidebook to 500 varieties. But *Haunted Britain* received an honourable mention in passing amongst his other titles.

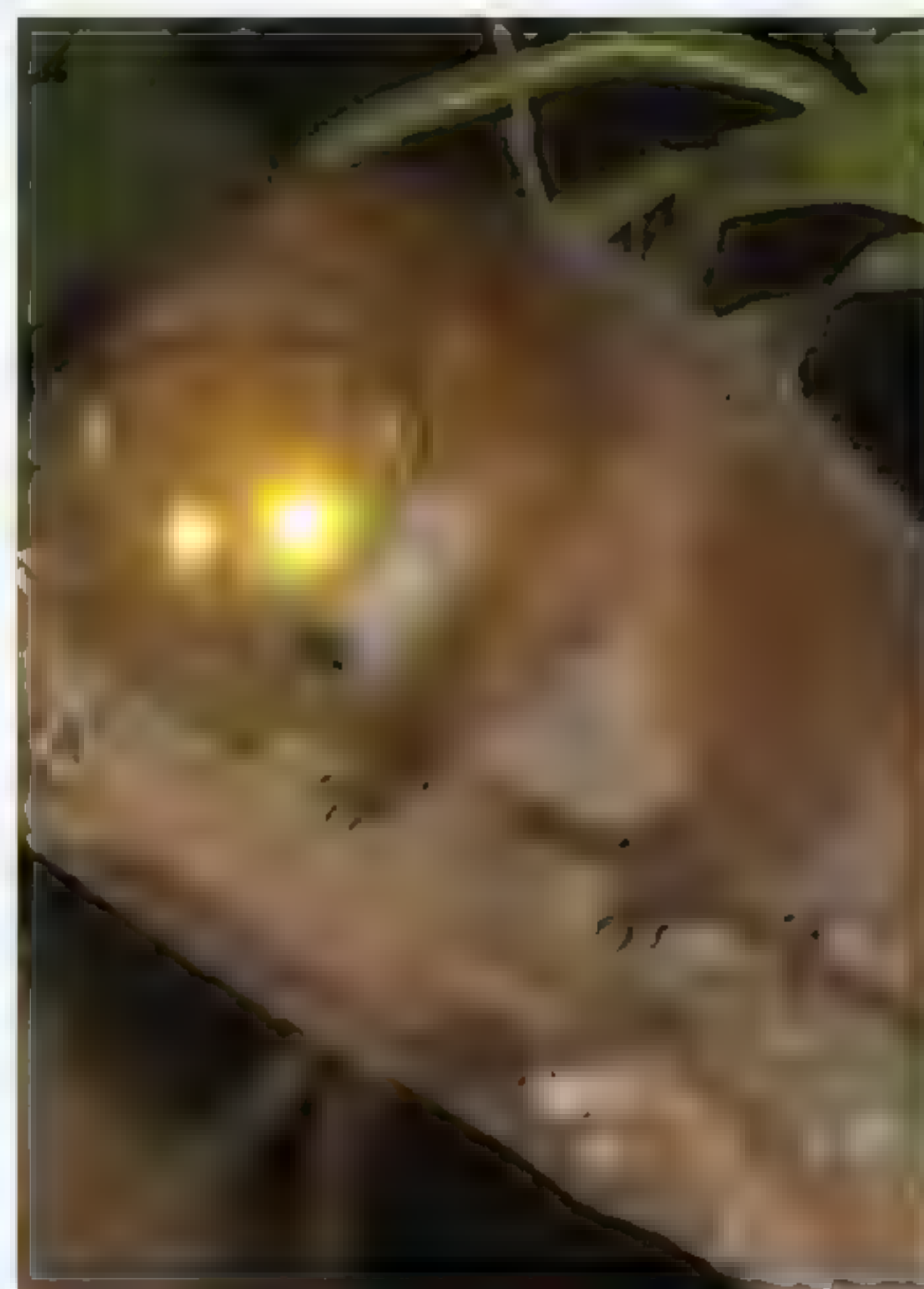
The posthumous reputation of *Haunted Britain* has grown in recent years, attracting scholarly interest for its influence: see "Spectral Nation: Characterizing British Haunted Landscapes through the Lens

of the Ghost Gazetteer and a Folk Horror Perspective" by Paul Darby and Niall Finneran in *Folklore* (2022), vol 133, no.3311-333. This academic study includes *Haunted Britain* among a number of influential texts of the time, contributing to the sense of the 1970s being 'a haunted generation' and shoring up certain attitudes concerning the past and an emphasis on tradition which now seem old-fashioned. They too pay tribute to the fine pictures, after succeeding in tracing one of the original photographers, Robert Estall.

As to whether such an impactful book so evocative to the imagination could emerge again today, I am doubtful. *Haunted Britain* seems to be a relic of a bygone era. Blessed (or cursed) as we are with instant communications from every corner of the globe and irradiated by often artificially contrived data and imagery inflicted digitally from all directions, our mental perceptions and, I suspect, our capacity for visualisation, are shifting along with our sense of time, place and the experiences of others. In tandem, the very contents of our consciousness including our dreams, fantasies and hallucinations are being re-shaped, and there are signs that even the content of apparitional and psychic experiences may be altering too (for an interesting discussion on the impact of the digital world on the inner eye see "Out of the Body Experiences in the Screen Age" (2023) by Sam Treasure in *Deep Weird*, edited by Jack Hunter). Those looking ahead at such developments may expect to see some very different types of phantoms emerging in the years to come when compared with those in *Haunted Britain*.



KARL SHUKER highlights mysteries and discoveries from East Africa and South America



ABOVE LEFT: The Mountains of the Moon – the Ruwenzori Mountains in East Africa – home to such cryptozoological curiosities as a giant pottedto and unidentified large black birds. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The big-eyed East African pottedto ‘glowering’ from the branch of a tree.

GOING POTTY OVER A POTTO

Some of cryptozoology’s least-known mystery beasts have often long been hiding in plain sight, at least in the sense that they have been documented in books or articles originally published many years ago, but which have never attracted cryptozoological attention. Consequently, whenever possible I try to rectify this sad situation by publicising them, frequently here in my AZ column, as soon as I learn about them. So here is yet another example, brought to my attention very recently on Facebook by FB friend Richard Hing.

Richard wondered if anyone had ever heard of a strange creature reportedly existing in East Africa’s Ruwenzori (Rwenzori) Mountains and briefly referred to by BBC wildlife film-maker and author Michael Bright in a *BBC Wildlife Magazine* article from November 1987 concerning the fauna of these famously inaccessible mountains, located on the border between Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). In his article, Michael had been writing about how fascinated by the Ruwenzoris and their natural history was Pelham Aldrich-Blake, producer of the renowned TV series *The Natural World* and a longstanding lover of mountain-climbing, and while listing the various creatures existing here Michael included the following short but very tantalising paragraph:

“Pelham also mentions the occasional solitary leopard and a creature that most people consider more mythical than fact – the 1.5m

[5ft]-long giant Ruwenzori pottedto, which shares the scientific twilight with Nessie and the yeti. It is described in the [local native] stories as simply a huge version of the well-known big-eyed primate and is supposed to glower at intruders from the branches of 10m [33ft] tall giant heathers.”

Pottos are related to, and somewhat resemble, the more familiar lorises of Asia, especially the slow lorises. For many years, only a single pottedto species, *Perodicticus pottedto*, was recognised, but in more recent times this has been divided taxonomically into three separate ones, based on genetic analyses published in 2015 indicating that they split from one another in evolutionary terms as long ago as the Miocene Epoch (23-5.3 million years ago). Nevertheless, they are all still united by one very noticeable shared feature – none of them exceeds around 50cm/20in (including its short tail) in total length, i.e. only a third the alleged length of the aptly-dubbed giant Ruwenzori pottedto. Consequently, assuming that the latter really does exist, and really is 1.5m (i.e. 150cm/60in) long, it seems reasonable to speculate that this exceptionally large variation on the pottedto theme does indeed represent a taxonomically discrete form still awaiting scientific recognition and naming. Incidentally, if anyone has additional information, *FT* and I would love to receive details.

Richard Hing, Facebook, 16 Aug 2023; Michael Bright, BBC Wildlife Magazine, Nov 1987.

THE MOON BIRDS OF RUWENZORI

Nor is this giant pottedto the only obscure cryptozoological curiosity on record from the Ruwenzoris. Two totally separate reports of very large but still-unidentified black birds have also been chronicled from these lofty peaks, popularly dubbed the Mountains of the Moon. The first ‘moon bird’ report, documented by John Preston in his Ruwenzoris travelogue *Touching The Moon*, is that of the local guide accompanying explorer Stephen Bagge during his Ruwenzori ascent in 1898. Bagge reached an altitude of 9,000ft (2,743m), but his guide climbed a little higher, alone, reaching Lake Bujuku, south of Mount Speke. According to this guide, he saw on its shores a number of all-black birds as large as sheep, which uttered an alarm call resembling the bellow of a bull when he tried to approach them, which scared him away. In 1906, conversely, a very extensive Ruwenzoris expedition led by Italian explorer the Duke of Abruzzi did not report encountering any such birds there. However, in his 1957 book *Animal Africa*, Canadian mountaineer Earl Denman recalled that while climbing the Ruwenzoris a few years earlier, he had watched a couple of very large unidentifiable black birds diving swiftly and almost vertically through the high mountain air. Were these of the same mystery species that Bagge’s guide had seen, or something different?

Cryptozoological author George Eberhart has speculated that Denman’s birds may have been a pair of Verreaux’s

eagles, *Aquila verreauxii*, which are indeed native to the highlands of East Africa, have predominantly black plumage, a very impressive wingspan of up to 8ft (2.4m), and an extremely dramatic aerial courtship display that features spectacular vertical dives. Consequently, I think this a plausible identity for Denman's birds, but Bagge's remain far more mystifying.

After all, it seems unlikely that a number of eagles would all congregate around the shores of a lake, and utter a bull-like sound when approached. To me, such behaviour is much more indicative of birds such as cranes, herons, storks, or even bustards, but I'm not aware of any known species that corresponds both morphologically and zoogeographically with Bagge's birds. And so, over a century later, these remain as enigmatic now as they were back in 1896. Once again, any additional info would be very welcome!

John Preston, *Touching the Moon* (Mandarin: London, 1990); Earl Denman, *Animal Africa* (Robert Hale: London, 1957).

A NEW CAT ALREADY LOST?

South America is home to several species of small spotted wild cat, all belonging to the exclusively New World felid genus *Leopardus*, including the ocelot *L. pardalis*, margay *L. wiedii*, and two species of oncilla or tigrina *L. tigrinus* and *L. guttulus*. In 1989, a single specimen of a tigrina-like cat was obtained on the Galeras Volcano in southern Andean Colombia's Nariño Department. Only its skin was retained, however, with no skull or skeletal elements, which was donated to the mammalian collection of Bogotá's Instituto Alexander von Humboldt. It was originally classed as a specimen of *L. tigrinus*, but when it was recently examined by a team of researchers led by Manuel Ruiz-García, they discovered sufficient differences, morphologically and genetically, to realise that this cat represented something very special and almost unheard of, zoologically speaking, in this day and age – an entirely new but hitherto-unrecognised wild cat species, and a very distinctive one at that. To quote the researchers:

"This skin also has unique, diagnostic features. Its ground coloration is more reddish than in other *Leopardus tigrinus* phenotypes. Most of the rosettes are bordered by black rims, but the rosettes' interiors have a much more intense reddish color than that of other *Leopardus tigrinus* specimens. Compared to other *Leopardus tigrinus* exemplars, the top of the cat's head and its dorsal crest are much darker. Its coat is denser and woollier. The head is rounder and wider, and the face is flatter. The body is short and relatively more robust than in other *Leopardus tigrinus* taxa."

Moreover, these differences were



LEFT: A Verreaux's eagle.

BELOW: The Magdalena tinamou. BOTTOM: The skin of the Nariño cat.

lived on Earth for millions of years before dying out only recently, but in almost complete zoological anonymity – only a solitary, unique skin existing to confirm that this beautiful creature was ever present on our planet at all, which I

find extremely sad.

<https://www.sci.news/biology/leopardus-narinensis-12160.html> 7 Aug 2023; <https://www.mdpi.com/2073-4425/14/6/1266> 15 June 2023.

BACK AFTER TWO CENTURIES

Then again, it's not unknown for Colombia to reveal elusive creatures alive and well long after they were thought to have become extinct. Take a very recent example, the Magdalena tinamou. Although outwardly resembling gallinaceous birds like quails and partridges, tinamous are extremely primitive, exclusively New World species most closely related to South America's flightless ostrich-like rheas and other ratites. The Magdalena tinamou has only been recorded from the Magdalena Valley in Tolima, Colombia, and (with a single exception) was until 2023 known only from historical records dating back 238 years. These documented the Colombia portion of Spain's Royal Botanical Expedition to the New Kingdom of Granada, which took place during 1783-1814 and explored a vast terrain that nowadays consists of the separate countries of Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, and Peru, plus northern Brazil and western Guyana. The above-mentioned single exception occurred in 1943, when a long-awaited type specimen for this reclusive bird was finally obtained, but apart from various unsubstantiated local sightings during the 1980s and 1990s, plus a supposed specimen kept in captivity but never confirmed, nothing more was heard of the Magdalena tinamou, and with much of its original forested habitat now gone it was deemed extinct. In 2023, however, Cristian Mauricio Cardona and Felipe Vasco found some specimens living in the dry forest between the municipalities of Honda and Guayabal-Armera in the north of Tolima. Originally classed as a distinct species, *Crypturellus saltuarius*, nowadays the Magdalena tinamou is often reclassified as a subspecies of the red-legged tinamou *C. erythropus*, thereby renaming it *C. e. saltuarius*.

www.instagram.com/p/Cva7qa8xTR9/?igshid=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ%3D%3D 2 Aug 2023; <https://extrategiamedios.com/colombia-redescubren-un-ave-endemica-colombiana-que-no-se-veia-hace-238-anos/> 1 Aug 2023.



also reflected on a genetic level following comparative mitochondria DNA analyses. In a formal scientific paper published by the journal *Gene* in June 2023, the researchers officially named this new cat *Leopardus narinensis*, commemorating the region of Colombia in which its skin had been obtained. However, the delight in knowing that our world is home to an additional cat species that we never even knew existed may be short-lived. To quote the researchers again:

"This new taxon is absent in the Latin American museums that we revised (in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay). In the wild, this taxon has not been recorded. Camera traps – since 2018 until now – in southern Colombia and northern Ecuador have yet to record the animal. This new taxon may be near-extinct or totally extinct. Henceforth, the specimen that we analysed should be one of the last living exemplars of this taxon."

In other words, because that single skin is presently unique as a preserved specimen, and with no living specimens known either, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that an entire cat species has

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS | Updates on news stories covered previously in FT, including Ouija panics and mystery cat shavers

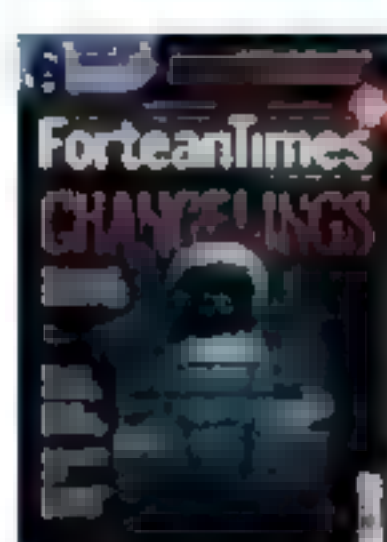
COLOMBIAN OUIJA PANIC [427:4-5, 431:4-5]



Ouija boards are continuing to fuel panics in Colombia. Following incidents in Hato and Pasto, the largest incident

yet reported took place at San Francisco de Asís School in Timbiquí, where 36 children were hospitalised in early July after allegedly “playing with a Ouija board”. The children were reported to be experiencing fainting, temporary loss of sight and anxiety – all classic social panic symptoms. They were sprinkled with holy water by local rector Emilio Balanta and prayed over before they left the school for hospital. “It is a very unusual phenomenon which occurred. A girl started to struggle so the others grabbed her so she wouldn’t hit herself, then another girl started to have the same problem,” said Balanta. “It was a diabolical situation. There is no explanation for what happened, there is none. Some say it’s because of the Ouija board and others because of an online challenge they found on the Internet.” He added that within a few days “around 90 per cent recovered. Some still have certain symptoms, but nothing major.” Amarildo Correa, the local education secretary said: “We are asking parents, administrators and teachers to be aware around students so we can prevent these types of events from happening again.” [mirror.co.uk](https://www.mirror.co.uk), 8 Jul 2023.

APOCALYPSE COW [FT373:44-47, 425:49]



Before the temples were built in Jerusalem in Old Testament times, Shiloh, an ancient town in Samaria, was for over three centuries the holiest Jewish site. It was where the sacred tabernacle was given its first permanent home.



In July, the town, in the present day Binyamin region, became a centre of heightened spiritual significance again for orthodox Jews. It has been selected as the place where the pure red heifers imported from America for the new temple rituals will be kept.

Hundreds of visitors have already travelled to see them in a special enclosure and thousands are expected in months to come. They may look at the cattle, but there is a strict no-touching rule.

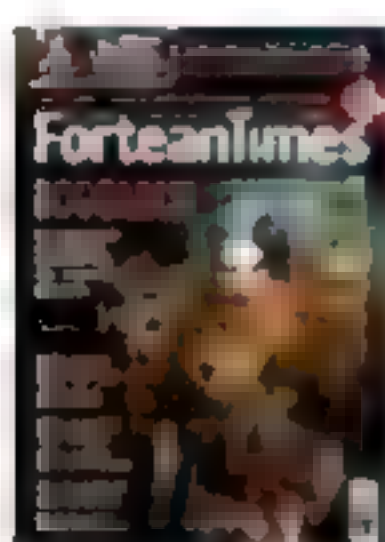
The importance of the animals goes back to the Book of Numbers, where Moses and Aaron are told by God to sacrifice “a perfectly red unblemished cow, upon which no yoke was laid” and use the ashes in a ritual of purification.

Today, many orthodox Jews believe that these same purifications rituals, using the ashes of a burned pure red heifer, must be carried out in order to be able to start building the new Temple in Jerusalem. According to Jewish tradition only nine pure red heifers were ever sacrificed in the period from Moses to the destruction of the Second Temple 2,000 years ago; another tradition claims that the tenth will be slaughtered by the Messiah. However, to many fundamentalist Christians in

America, the rebuilding of the Temple is a sign of the imminent return of Christ and so it is American Christians who have been breeding, selecting and transporting heifers to Israel.

“This is an exciting and exceptional event for the entire Jewish people,” said the head of the Ancient Shiloh Heritage site, Coby Mamo. And the head of the Binyamin Regional Council Israel Ganz called the cow’s arrival an “historic moment”, adding that the Red Heifer Center could attract up to one million visitors a year from Israel and around the world. [israelnationalnews.com](https://www.israelnationalnews.com), 14 July; [israeltoday.co.il](https://www.israeltoday.co.il), 16 July 2023.

SMOKESTACK LIGHTNING [FT416:4]



The Hunga Tonga volcanic eruption near the Pacific island of Tonga in January 2022 continues to break records. It had previously been documented as producing the greatest concentration of lightning ever detected, having a plume so tall it touched space and generating a tsunami the height of the Statue of Liberty as well as creating anomalous tides worldwide. Now it has been shown to have

LEFT: A red heifer in its new home at the Ancient Shiloh heritage site. It is hoped that the new Red Heifer Centre will attract a million visitors each year.

hit the record for the highest altitudes that lightning has ever been known to start, 20 to 30 km (12.5 to 18.6 miles) above sea level, according to a paper in the 28 June edition of the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*. Lightning can extend much higher in the atmosphere, but its point of origin is usually no more than 20km (12.5 miles) above sea level; higher than that and the air pressure is usually too low to allow the formation of “leaders”, the charged channels that the hot plasma of the lightning arcs through, but the plume of the volcano raised the air pressure and enabled lightning to form at record heights. “We’re seeing stuff that we’ve never seen before,” says Jeff Lapierre, one of the study’s authors. “Hunga has completely changed the way we think of how natural events can change the atmosphere, and the environment where we thought lightning could exist.” [sciencenews.org](https://www.sciencenews.org), 22 Jun 2023.

GENDER REVEAL VICTIMS [FT413:6-7]



The sorry litany of gender reveal disasters has claimed another victim. A party in San Pedro, Mexico, involved a plane flying over a party and releasing pink smoke and confetti to announce the sex of the baby. In a video of the event the expectant couple can be seen holding hands and watching the plane flying over a lit-up “Oh Baby” sign festooned with pink and blue balloons. Footage posted on X/Twitter, though, shows the plane going on to spin out of control and slam into the ground while friends and family, oblivious



CLIVE ROWLANDSON / SWNS

ABOVE: The latest work by the elusive artist dubbed the "Borrowdale Banksy"; its location is being kept secret.

of the tragedy, cheer on the parents. The pilot Luis Ángel, 32, of Navolato, Sinaloa, was rescued from the wreckage with serious injuries, but died later in hospital. *D. Telegraph*, 4 Sept 2023.

BORROWDALE BANKSY [FT408:22]



The mystery artist who has been creating Andy Goldsworthy-like landscape sculptures in the Lake District since 2021 has created a new work, again in an inaccessible area of the National Park. It is a semi-circle built out of local slate propped against a rock face, but the exact location is not being revealed to protect the work from damage and to avoid attracting people who can't cope with the difficult terrain. A previous, more accessible, work in Buttermere became something of a tourist attraction but was later found toppled. The Lake District National Park Authority said it was aware of

the latest addition but not the artist's identity, while sculptor Shawn Williamson from Windermere, once suspected of creating the "incredibly mysterious" artworks, said they took on "the lifeblood or essence of the Lakes". *BBC News*, 27 Jun 2023.

SATANIC PANIC REDUX [FT425:4]



Eleven people accused of operating a Satanic ritual abuse ring in Glasgow have now come to trial. Iain Owens, 45, Elaine Lannery, 39, Lesley Williams, 41, Paul Brannan, 41, Marianne Gallagher, 38, Scott Forbes, 50, Barry Watson, 47, Mark Carr, 49, Richard Gachagan, 45, Leona Laing, 50, and John Clark, 46, have been charged with crimes against four children including rape and attempted murder over a 10-year period from 2010 to 2020, all of which they deny. The defendants are alleged to have forced children to participate in séances and

use a Ouija board to "call on spirits and demons", as well as take part in classes involving witchcraft, spells and wands, which made them believe that they had "metamorphosed into animals". It is alleged that one girl was chased by people wearing Devil masks, hung by her clothing from a nail on the wall, shut in a microwave, an oven, a fridge, a freezer and cupboards, as well as being forced to eat dog food and act like a dog, and that a boy was put in a bath he was told was filled with blood. The accused have also been charged with animal cruelty, including dog abuse, and forcing a child to stab a budgie to death, of sexually abusing the children in various ways, often with others cheering them on, and of possessing diamorphine and cocaine.

The array of alleged assaults and abuses recalls accusations made against defendants in both Britain and the US during the "Satanic Panic" of the late 1980s and early 1990s (see *FT*57:46-62). The panic involved

over 12,000 people being charged with Satanic ritual abuse, inspired by claims that huge numbers of "Satanists" were abusing children as part of a massive underground network. This idea originated with groups of extreme evangelical Christians and still informs the Qanon-linked belief that the world is run by a child trafficking paedophile "elite". Prosecutions were often based on the now discredited technique of hypnotic "recovered memory therapy", coercive questioning and an array of symptoms supposedly indicating Satanic abuse that were extremely vague and highly subjective.

Very few of those accused were actually convicted, although their lives were blighted by many years of investigation and suspicion, and those who were convicted eventually had their sentences quashed due to miscarriages of justice. *independent.co.uk*, 5 Sept 2023.

CAT SHAVER MYSTERY [FT414:4, 430:24]



After the resurgence of cat shaving incidents in Coventry and the Medway towns at the beginning of this year, the number of alleged incidents ballooned to more than 80 by the end of March. While some of the new attacks occurred close to the previous incidents, others were reported from Craigie, near Aberdeen, Scotland, Rugeley in Staffordshire, Southampton, and Littlehampton in West Sussex.

Natasha McPhee, 39, who runs the Animals Lost and Found charity in Gillingham, Kent, feared some of these were (ahem) copycat incidents and said: "I have no explanation why or who would do such a thing. Personally, I think they are sick and need to be caught as quickly as possible." She urged owners whose pets were victims of cat shaving to contact either her charity, which is keeping track of attacks, or the RSPCA. *mirror.co.uk*, 28 Mar 2023.



NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to two very different critics of the modern Western lifestyle: Britain's eccentric roadkill gourmet and America's notorious 'Unabomber'

ARTHUR BOYT

Arthur Boyt carved out a small but particular niche for himself as Britain's premier exponent of roadkill cuisine, eating almost exclusively meat that he had retrieved from the roadside. He had been consuming roadkill since he was 13 and would eat badger, rat, pheasant, weasels, polecats, hedgehogs, squirrels and even otters – anything he could find dead on the grass verge or the beach, cooking them with vegetables he had grown himself. His motto was “just because it doesn't have a label doesn't mean it's not edible.”

Interviewed by *CornwallLive* about his plans for Christmas dinner one year, he said that he was looking forward to a meal that would include sprouts, roast potatoes and casseroled whale and admitted to being particularly fond of the taste of dog, which he described as “tender as veal with the consistency of lamb.” The oddest tasting food he'd ever eaten was a bat, he said.

Boyt's diet had a strong ethical component: “I don't like buying and eating meat. I feel very strongly about killing animals. I can only just about manage a chicken leg at a party or something.” His wife Sue was vegetarian, so did not share Boyt's exotic diet. Boyt periodically appeared on TV cooking shows extolling the virtues of a roadkill diet, and in 2022 published *Roadkill: Recollections, Reminiscences and Recipes*, looking back at his life as a roadkill aficionado and sharing his favourite recipes. As well as eating roadkill, he amassed a considerable collection of bones and taxidermy.

Born in Watford and brought up in a family of Exclusive Brethren (a sect of the evangelical Plymouth Brethren), Boyt got his taste for roadkill at the age of 13



ABOVE LEFT: Roadkill expert Arthur Boyt with his next meal. ABOVE RIGHT: Ted Kaczynski at UC Berkeley in 1968.

after finding a dead pheasant in Windsor Great Park and taking it home for his mother to roast. He studied biology at university and worked for some years as an entomologist. He married his wife, Patricia, in 1977 and moved with her to a 500-year-old farmhouse on Davidstow Moor in Cornwall when he retired after a career as an information officer. There, he dedicated himself to cycling, orienteering, birdwatching and roadkill. He sang in a male voice choir and was skilled at building treehouses and sheds from recycled materials.

Family friend Helen O'Hare said: “He was a kind and generous man and helped many people on his journey through life. He was an inspiration on how to live simply with as low an impact on the Earth as possible. He will be missed greatly. His like will certainly not be seen again.”

Arthur Boyt, roadkill gourmet; born Watford, 3 Sept 1939; died Devon, 4 July 2023, aged 83

TED KACZYNSKI, THE “UNABOMBER”

Ted Kaczynski was a child prodigy who was admitted to Harvard at only 16 and seemed to be on track for a career at the highest academic level in mathematics until in 1969, at the age of 27, he abruptly resigned from his tenure-track assistant professor post at the University of California, Berkeley. He had not got on well with students and made no friends among the staff, and department chairman John W Addison later said that while “Kaczynski seemed almost pathologically shy”, his resignation was unexpected. For the next two years Kaczynski lived at his parents' home in Lombard, Illinois, before moving to a remote cabin he had built outside Lincoln, Montana. There, he tried to live a simple, reclusive, life with little money and no electricity or running water, working odd jobs but also receiving significant financial

support from his family. It was from there that he conducted a campaign in which he mailed 16 home-made bombs to various targets between 1978 and 1995, killing three people and injuring 23 others. He initially sent bombs to academics, including a California geneticist and a Yale University computer expert, and airlines. His predilection for university targets earned him the nickname “The Unabomber”, although he later expanded his range to include the owner of a computer rental store, an advertising executive and a timber industry lobbyist.

Kaczynski proved extremely difficult to track down due to his off-grid lifestyle and meticulous approach to constructing bombs. He carefully tested his explosives and mailed them in handcrafted wooden boxes sanded to remove possible fingerprints, although he marked some of his later bombs “FC” for “Freedom Club”.



Despite living as a recluse, Kaczynski maintained an active correspondence with the outside world, gaining a following on both the right and the left for his screeds opposing modern civilisation. However, it was his jeremiads against the 20th century that proved to be his downfall; in 1995, he used threats of violence to persuade the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to publish his 35,000-word manifesto, a sustained rant against modern life and technology and the damage they did to the environment. Kaczynski's brother recognised the tone of the document and tipped off the FBI, who, in April 1996, arrested him at his remote cabin, where they also found his journals, a coded diary, explosive ingredients and two completed bombs, bringing to an end the US's longest, costliest manhunt.

Held in jail prior to his trial, he attempted to hang himself with his underpants and was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. However, he chose to plead guilty rather than allow his lawyers to present an insanity defence. As a result, he was given four life sentences plus 30 years in prison and remained there for the rest of his life. He was eventually admitted to the Federal Medical Center in Butner, North Carolina, suffering from late-stage cancer, and was found unresponsive in his cell there, having committed suicide successfully this time. "He's turned into an iconic figure for both the far-right and far-left," said Daryl Johnson, a domestic terrorism expert at the New Lines Institute. "He definitely stands out from the rest of the pack as far as his level of education and the meticulous nature in which he went about designing his bombs."

Theodore John Kaczynski, mathematician, eco-fundamentalist and US domestic terrorist; born Chicago, Illinois, 22 May 1942; died Butner, North Carolina, 10 June 2023, aged 81.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

SHADOW OF THE CAT

Let me introduce *Felis silvestris silvestris* (henceforth *FSS*), the British wild cat, an animal that once pawed it over the whole island, but that is now restricted to the Scottish Highlands. *FSS* avoids humans, but when cornered it can be ferocious. I recently had an uncomfortably close encounter with a fearless weasel – a reminder that even small animals can get the heart racing.

We might see glimpses of *FSS* in British folklore. The Welsh hero Cai fought the Cat of Palug on Ynys Mon: in other versions of the legend, King Arthur was killed by this Anglesey kitty. The man and the cat legend from Northumberland has another knight assaulted by a cat. Then there is a curious tale from Leyland, Lancashire, about a cat that keeps moving building materials for a church (a story often featuring the Devil). Things don't end well: "the cat with a piercing scream, sprang upon [the night guard], flung him to the ground and fixed its teeth in his throat."

It is unlikely that *FSS* survived in England by 1800, save perhaps in Cumberland. Are these narratives, then, memories of the wild cat from before it was driven out, or are they memories of something deeper? I'm not sure, but I'm confused by the absence of the cat from the repertoires of English shapechangers. We have fiery sheep, headless

bears, horses of all sizes, dogs, cows and bristling hogs, but I know of no cat: a strange exception given the charisma of the snooziest domestic puss. Perhaps the ABC is an attempt to make up for lost opportunities? I have been struck, instead, by the number of references to cat spirits in fairy encounters. Tom Charman, an interwar fairy seer, used to observe 'cat-like' spirits in the New Forest.

The following experiences are taken from *Fairy Census 2* (now almost ready for publication): "It was black and cat shaped but had long ears like a rabbit"; I noticed "something like a cat out of the corner of my eye"; "I have seen... not really a cat but [a] looking like a cat figure"; "she saw one that was like a cat".

Perhaps our lizard brain processes the external in feline terms as a survival mechanism? Certainly, in prehistory we frequently ran

into *Dinofelis*, a jaguarish 'specialist primate killer' with a jaw that was calibrated to lock around the human head: *Dinofelis* had "short, dagger-like teeth" to break our skull as if it were a nut in a cracker. If we have atavistic flickers of cats thrown up against our cortex walls by the fire of consciousness, it likely has more to do with *Dino* than the long-suffering *FSS*.

Simon Young is the author of *The Nail in the Skull and Other Victorian Urban Legends* (University Press of Mississippi, 2022).

THERE IS A
CURIOUS TALE
ABOUT A CAT
THAT KEEPS
MOVING BUILDING
MATERIALS FOR A
CHURCH

Charting the ufologists

NIGEL WATSON tries to keep up with a revolving door of whistleblowers and a slew of new acronyms

ONLY CONNECT

For newcomers to the UFO scene, or even us grizzled veterans of the subject, working out who's who in the subject is pretty tricky, especially when new whistleblowers, witnesses and experts keep turning up, and particularly with the formation of official and unofficial organisations with annoying and confusing acronyms.

After several years of ufological decline this flood of renewed interest in the subject began in 2017, when guitarist for rock group Blink-182, Tom DeLonge, set up the To The Stars Academy (TTSA) along with former CIA intelligence officer, Jim Semivan, and Harold E Puthoff (**FT361:28** and *passim*).

It was in December of that same year the *New York Times* carried the story that Nevada Senator Harry Reid had helped obtain \$22 million for aerospace contractor Robert Bigelow to set up the Bigelow Aerospace Advanced Space Studies (BAASS) project, and, under its umbrella, the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP), headed by Luis Elizondo (**FT363:28-29**). It is disputed whether AATIP was an official part of BAASS, but Elizondo did join TTSA and made a name for himself in the mainstream media. The TTSA is now focused on being an entertainment company (tothestars.media/en-gb/blogs/press-and-news), and the AATIP no longer exists. Since then, it seems to be a trend that government whistleblowers leave to join UFO disclosure campaign groups and organisations.

Elizondo, after leaving TTSA, along with Sean Cahill, a retired US Navy Chief Master-at-Arms, and two others set up SkyFort, to: "Provide necessary data and information on unidentified aerial phenomena to key leaders and policymakers to help them make informed decisions."

David Fravor, as he was quick to point out at the Congressional Hearing held on 26 July 2023 (**FT436:28-31**), is the Executive Director of Americans for Safe Aerospace. Its website (www.safeaerospace.org) notes that it "is a military pilot led nonprofit organization dedicated to aerospace safety and national security" and goes on to say that "identifying domain awareness gaps is critical to US national security. If UAP are foreign assets, we must respond appropriately. If UAP continue to defy conventional explanation – we must invest in scientific research."

In May 2023, whistleblower David Grusch became the Chief Operating Officer for the non-profit Sol Foundation. This was created by Dr Garry Nolan who believes 100 per cent that exotic/alien intelligences are visiting us, and



he specialises in analysing UAP materials and the biological effects of UAPs on witnesses. The aim of the Sol Foundation is, according to its website (thesolfoundation.org), to bring together "experts from academia and government to address the philosophical, policy, and scientific problems raised by the likely presence on the Earth of UAP".

To that end they are holding an inaugural conference at Stanford University on 17-19 November 2023. This will bring together Avi Loeb, Charles McCullough, Cristopher Mellon, Garry Nolan, Jacques Vallée and other leading academic and government voices on UAP, to discuss the scientific study of UAP data and the philosophical and global security issues it raises.

As can be seen, these are all people who have been pushing the UAP agenda for many years and have had important roles in US Government agencies; for example, Charles McCullough was Inspector General of the Intelligence Community, was an FBI Special Agent for 10 years, and now is a senior partner at the Compass Rose Legal Group, where he is David Grusch's lawyer.

To get a handle on the runners and riders of ufology and their interconnections, you might want to visit Luis Cayetano's very useful website, Mapping the UFO Scene, and use the association charts at: www.ufologyis corrupt.com/post/mapping-the-ufo-scene-using-association-charts. This has a chart showing the links between the intelligence community and the old civilian National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP). Cayetano notes this does not show an "over-arching X-Files-style conspiracy, but rather a series of ad hoc motivations within these agencies that changed through time and that served a number of purposes."

He also observes that his ongoing mapping of the current UFO scene in the US puts the subject in a wider context, which is helpful because: "People are often ignorant about

LEFT: We're going to need a bigger wall... one of Luis Cayetano's ufological charts.

the historical precedents pertaining to government involvement in the UFO narrative, and therefore imagine the current spat to be something totally new under the sun. However, to return to NICAP, it is noteworthy that there are some striking parallels between Tom DeLonge's 'To The Stars Academy' and the early NICAP initiatives that called upon crowd-funding to finance UFO investigations and to crack open new vistas of knowledge. Another key similarity is the central role played by former intelligence, counter-intelligence and military people in pushing the narrative."

Cayetano thinks the reason for the interest in UFOs in the intelligence community is caused by their wildest speculations that "take on a sort of objective reality of their own when they are being conveyed by people drinking from the same fountain and the fountain is obscured from view. I would argue that most of ufology, at least if we understand that term to mean the subculture around UFO belief and alien visitation/abduction/tech recovery tropes, works along these lines, with circuits of feedback amplifying narratives and stories, but it is perhaps the case that such stories might find especial resonance in the intelligence community."

It is fascinating to see the interconnections charted on these maps although it is rather difficult to view them on a small screen, and to do them justice you probably need a wall-sized chart.

ILLEGAL CRAFT

Steven Greer, "the world's leading authority on the subject of UFO's/UAPs, advanced energy and propulsion systems", held the Disclosure 2.0 Conference in June 2023, to plug his new film *The Lost Century – and How to Reclaim It!*

Greer has in his long career identified over 700 government and corporate UAP whistleblowers, and contrary to the non-terrestrial claims he thinks "the so-called Tic Tac and many other UFOs/UAPs are actually man-made, illegally operated craft... They are made with embezzled and illegal funds, designed to deceive the President, Congress, media, and the public."

His key point is that 'they' are suppressing "new energy technologies that will save the Earth and pave the way for a new, free civilization."

Who 'they' are is another matter...



By any other name...

JENNY RANGLES considers the changing terminology used to talk about unexplained things in the sky

There has been a lot of talk recently about names for the phenomenon we study. Should we use the new term 'UAP' rather than 'UFO'? Both are more modern than the still popular 'Flying Saucer'.

The term UFO – Unidentified Flying Object – was coined by Captain Edward J Ruppelt, who ran the USAF investigation into sightings in the early 1950s to reassure the public that it was something their Government had under control. This official investigation needed a sober term, partly to justify why the USAF was investigating something portrayed in the media as a bit of a joke – something citizens might think not their tax dollars should be paying for.

It was probably expected that these sightings would be a short-lived fad in the vigilant days right after World War II. That conflict had seen an unprecedented outburst of technological creativity, with the birth of radar in Britain just before the war started, followed by huge advances in aircraft technology and, of course, the atomic bomb. On the German side, there were the 'V' weapons created by the Nazis, bomb-laden unmanned aerial craft that were unleashed against British cities from 1944.

And, indeed, even before the post-war Flying Saucers there was a predecessor known to American air crews on bombing missions over Europe. They named it after a popular comic strip, Smokey Stover by Bill Holman, who had a character who drove a 'foo-mobile' to fight fires and called himself a 'foo fighter'. It wasn't just the Americans who saw these things. Most Allied crews did at some point. I was fortunate enough to interview Michael Bentine (see **FT64:32, 416:29**) who, before his career in showbiz, was an intelligence officer with a serious claim to be Britain's first UFO investigator. During the war, he had the job of debriefing air crew – mostly Polish – returning to UK bases, several of whom described these objects to him. Bentine heard that they followed the aircraft at a distance, appearing as small balls of 'fire'. His bosses feared they might be a secret Nazi weapon, so he asked the crew what these things did to their aircraft and they said: "Nothing". So, as he told me, "They were not much use as a weapon." Were they some kind of atmospheric effect, I asked. Bentine did not know, and the mystery was never resolved. Perhaps it was no more complicated than air crew, quickly trained to fly because of the demands of war, not being aware of things you might see in aerial combat. Other

The media took the catchy phrase 'flying saucer' to heart

more seasoned aircrew might dismiss such things, but the new guys, in their naturally heightened state of alert, might see things differently.

So, across a single decade, three different terms emerged for things seen in the sky that we did not understand. From 'foo fighter' fireballs to unusual aircraft "skipping like a saucer" seen in daylight by another pilot, Kenneth Arnold, in 1947, to Ruppelt's UFOs. Arnold didn't see saucers like those in the movies. He was talking about the skipping, bouncing motion of the objects, using a saucer as an analogy. Yet the words 'flying' and 'saucer' stuck and became a template for many of the other things people have reported over the next 76 years; many bore no resemblance to a saucer, but the media took that catchy phrase to heart.

The names we use to describe what we see have a powerful hold over the way our culture reports, rewrites and ultimately creates what people think they witnessed. What someone actually sees and what becomes the 'legend' is blurred almost from the start by how human perception works and how social factors create dominant paradigms for such accounts; humans and the media shape reality, rather than simply observing it like a camera.

Terms morphed fast over that first decade; foo fighters quickly lost out to flying saucers, and while Ruppelt's Unidentified Flying Object and its snappy acronym UFO took hold, and has stuck to this day, it has never fully displaced the flying saucer: even though most of those you see in TV and movies bear little resemblance to what Kenneth Arnold saw over the Cascade Mountains in June 1947.

'Close Encounter' was added to the terminology thanks to Steven Spielberg in 1977, who titled his film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* after a term created by Dr J Allen Hynek in the early 1970s. Hynek was an astronomy professor and also the Project Blue Book case adviser for over 20 years; he was there when Ruppelt

BELOW: One of Kenneth Arnold's 'flying saucers'.

introduced the term UFO.

Since then, our terminology has remained fairly static. And UFO, Close Encounter and even Flying Saucer are familiar to most people today; even the one that got away – Foo Fighters – has had a revival due to the rock band bearing its name. However, recently things changed and we have been hearing about a new kid on the block (not another band!) in the form of 'UAP', which has been reported in our media for some months as investigations into unexplained things witnessed by air crews have been released.



Interestingly, UAP is not as new a term as most think. I first used it in a book written 43 years ago, and I was not the only one: Paul Devereux did too in his research into Earthlights. We had both been using this acronym for some time, unaware of the Ministry of Defence employing it in a lengthy MoD file called the Condign report put together in the late 1990s, specifically about UAP not UFOs, and eventually made public (see p16-17). But Paul Devereux has the edge on me here because his UAP stood for exactly the term the UK used 23 years ago and that US military use today: Unidentified Aerial Phenomena. I think it was coincidence, not cooperation, that led to all three of us doing so.

I actually used UAP from the late 1970s to mean 'Unidentified Atmospheric Phenomenon', focusing on the idea some UFO cases were caused by an as yet unidentified naturally occurring phenomenon in the atmosphere (perhaps that was what foo fighters were).

But it is these recent objects that are now termed Unidentified Aerial Phenomena and filmed by modern in-flight cameras. Are we seeing sophisticated technology from friendly or unidentified sources? Maybe. But I still think the UAP I was describing from the 1970s onward do exist and may be a rare form of atmospheric plasma. We may have to rename them now that UAP is taken – perhaps UPP or Unidentified Plasma Phenomena – but I still suspect they are out there. Quite possibly UAP, UFOs and UPP might all coexist; and so might something else not yet covered by these three acronyms. Our research just got both more complicated but also more interesting.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SPOOK SHOWS

Brace yourself for a midnight fright as **BRIAN J ROBB** chronicles the history of the live 'spook shows', from the American Depression to the coming of television.

Before midnight movies and late-night television horror shows there were the 'spook shows'. These live midnight ghost shows gained popularity during the Great Depression in the United States, but the elements that made up the typical spook show date back even further. They can be traced through the illusions practised by stage magicians, the vogue for Spiritualism and séances in the late-19th century, even the phantasmagorical light shows provided by the magic lantern.

In the 1950s, the spook show made a dramatic comeback, often paired with a horror or science fiction B-movie, with some shows featuring a live performance by one-time Dracula star Bela Lugosi. The spook shows were emblematic of the not-so-subtle art form of 'ballyhoo', the come-on advertising that promised much more than the often threadbare shows could ever achieve. Although television largely killed off the live spook show, the art form lives on in occasional revivals. After all, there's nothing like an in-person fright night of scares and laughs for Hallowe'en...

SPOOK SHOW ORIGINS

The first true theatrical precursor to the spook shows emerged in 18th century France. In 1799, Belgian optician Étienne-Gaspard Robert projected narrative images from a 'magic lantern' (see p.32) at a convent in Paris. Robert was recognised by Charles Dickens as "a well-educated showman", and his innate showmanship saw him lay the groundwork for the dramatic mix of phantasmagorical theatricality, magical illusion and cinematic trickery of the later spook shows.

John Henry Pepper's famous ghost illusion of 1862 took things a stage further. Pepper developed his trick as part of a stage production of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. 'Pepper's



LEFT: The art of ballyhoo at a 'Midnite Spook Show' by Dr Draculas and his Spooks in person; one banner advises: "Sissies stay home". **BELOW:** A colourful advert for 1930s spook show pioneer ElWyn, aka Elwin-Charles Peck, promises that "Ghosts leave the stage, come into the audience and sit with you". **FACING PAGE:** Ray-Mond was another spook show staple through the 1940s and 1950s.

Ghost', as the magical illusion became known, relied upon an almost-invisible glass sheet to create an apparition that could interact with the live actors (see FT400:16).

SPOOK SHOWS WERE EMBLEMATIC OF THE NOT-SO-SUBTLE ART FORM OF 'BALLYHOO'



Pepper's initial demonstration featured a seated skeleton in a white shroud manipulated by a black-clad actor who was invisible to the audience. The same set-up made objects appear or disappear, or people transform into other shapes. Used in the 19th century in a spate of ghost-themed plays following Pepper's innovation, the trick went on to have a new life in carnival sideshows and, especially, in a well-known 'girl-into-gorilla' transformation spectacle.

The gradual disappearance of the Pepper's Ghost illusion by the 1890s from the popular imagination allowed for its reinvention in the 20th century as part of carnival sideshows, sensational entertainments like the ghost train or the haunted house, and in travelling medicine shows that spread across America. This was effectively combined with the theatricality of Spiritualism and the séance room, which featured table-tipping, spirit cabinet routines, and ghostly apparitions; magician and escapologist Harry Houdini was a well-known campaigner against fake Spiritualists. The combination of theatrical magic, fakery and illusion, and the desire of the audience to be willingly 'spooked' gave rise to the emergence of the 1930s 'spook show'.

RAY-MOND

GHOST SHOW

SPOOKS
THAT WALK
GHOSTS THAT TALK

*Shivers!
Suddens!
Thrills!*

DON'T BE
A SISSY!

COME

EVEN IF YOUR
HEART
IS WEAK!

*Thousands
Now Living
will Never Die!*

Also -
A Full Length
Mystery Thriller

TALKING PICTURES

Radio had been the dominant entertainment medium in the United States throughout the 1920s, until the movies learned how to talk. It was the new element of moving pictures with sound that brought the spook show in from the cold, away from the travelling sideshows and patent medicine purveyors and into the nation's theatres. In 1929, stage magician Elwin-Charles Peck – who performed as El-Wyn – developed a new act that drew upon all of these old theatrical and optical traditions while putting a brand new spin on them. He saw an opportunity to extend his performances into the small hours after every other performer had left the stage with his development of El-Wyn's Midnite Spook Party.

El-Wyn began his show as a cod-séance, warning that after the 'witching hour' anything was possible. For an hour or so, he mixed magic tricks with elements of Spiritualism, claiming to be in contact with 'the other side' (the 'patter' was important) and using the fake techniques Houdini (who'd died in 1926) had exposed. Strange voices haunted the theatre, objects appeared to levitate and people appeared and disappeared. At the climax, the theatre went pitch black. Out of the darkness emerged glowing 'spirits of the dead' that flew over the audience's heads, driving them wild with fright. All it took was luminous paint (a new innovation) and theatrical 'ghost' props run on wires! Tactile effects were part of this three-minute 'blackout' experience – rice would be thrown into the crowd, or water pistols would be fired off. Wet strings from old mops were dangled from poles above the crowd, suggesting slimy worms falling from the ceiling. Silk threads could be substituted for a spider web effect. Anything that could startle, but not injure, was fair game. Spook shows could be boisterous!

What made El-Wyn's take on the spooky



ABOVE: Jack Baker, alias Dr Silkini, appears at the Orpheum Theatre with his travelling Asylum of Horrors show, offering both "Frankenstein in Person" and the 1940 Republic serial *Drums of Fu Manchu*.

theatrical performance unique was his incorporation of movies. The inclusion of a frightening film as part of the package put the finishing touch to the spook show – the film would often set the tone, followed by the magic act, and concluding with the all-important climactic 'blackout'. During the Depression of the early-1930s, El-Wyn toured the US with his innovative Spook Party package, bringing in a clear \$3,000 profit each week. It was only natural

that a host of imitators would jump on the midnight spook show bandwagon: there was money in them thar ghouls! Those inspired by El-Wyn's innovations included the pseudonymous likes of Francisco, Greystoke, Raymond, Dr Ogre Banshee, and even Dr Evil – a cast of characters that stretched through the 1940s and into the 1950s. However, one man was dubbed the true 'ghostmaster' – Toledo-based Jack Baker, who performed as Dr Silkini.

SPOOK SHOW PRE-HISTORY THE MAGIC LANTERN

The magic lantern was an early slide projector that threw images – paintings, etching, prints, and later photographs – onto a large screen. The images were printed (initially hand-painted) onto transparent glass plates (the slides), with a light source (a candle or oil lamp) expanding the image through a lens to immense size. The theory dated back to the early 17th century, when a pseudo-scientific and occult interest in optics developed across Europe. In the mid-1600, the concept was known among a select few, with Dutch scientist Christiaan Huygens describing a primitive projection system in



1645. It wasn't until the later 1600s that people began to actually construct the devices in any number (Samuel Pepys reputedly bought a magic

lantern in August 1666). From its earliest days, the magic lantern was connected to the occult. Writing to Huygens in March 1660, Pierre Guisony

speculated that Jesuit scholar Arhanasius Kircher might misuse the device: "If only he knew... of the Lantern, he would surely frighten the cardinals with spectres." Kircher did project images, such as a figure trapped in Purgatory taunted by Hellfire and Death wielding a scythe. Legend has it Kircher used his lantern to project Death onto the windows of 'apostates', hoping to scare them back to church. The connection between projected images and ghosts was established early on: the first lantern slides used often featured spectral subjects, whether sacred or profane.



ABOVE: A ticket for one of Dr Silkini's 'Stage & Screen Shows' came complete with a 'Faint Check for delicate attendees. BELOW: A playbill for Dr Silkini's Ghost Show suggested that "Ladies should have Male Escort".



FAMOUS MONSTERS

Baker drew upon the pioneering work of El-Wyn and crossed it with the success of the freewheeling comedy film *Hellzapoppin'* (1941). Baker adopted the sense of speed from that movie; after one trick or joke the performer moved so quickly to the next the audience barely had time to draw breath. Baker's Dr Silkini served up a more satirical take on the séance, while also genuinely scaring his audience. Dr Silkini's Asylum of Horrors show was fast-paced, with Baker and his team tossing out throwaway jokes, performing rapid-fire magic tricks, staging scary skits and inviting the audience to participate.

A particular innovation introduced by Baker/Silkini was to feature real 'live' monsters as part of the show. These were low-paid performers dressed up as 'famous monsters', mainly those popularised by the Universal horror cycle of the 1930s and 1940s. Lunging into the audience wearing

THE PROMOTION ADS PROMISED A VISIT FROM 'GARGANTA, THE GIANT GORILLA'

rubber masks and frightening those present were blood sucking vampires, a mummy, a gruesome hunchback, and the inevitable lumbering Frankenstein's monster. This, combined with Baker's on-stage hypnosis of willing victims, turned the show into a monster-driven revue.

Central to the Silkini experience was the inevitable 'blackout' moment; but Baker believed that more was always better, so the show featured *multiple* blackouts. He lifted the flying luminous ghosts and skeletons from El-Wyn, but also added 'real live snakes' to the mix, which he tossed into the crowd. Baker filched the entire 'creation' sequence from the original 1931 Frankenstein movie in his climatic 'Making a Monster' skit. Accompanied by the inevitable Igor hunchbacked assistant, Dr Silkini piled random body parts onto his laboratory table, with the stage lit in a sickly green. These were covered with a sheet, then the lights went out as – illuminated by flashes of lightning (with suitably thunderous sound effects) – the sheet was pulled away to reveal the finished Frankenstein's monster, which then clambered from the table, throttled the hunchback, and ran amuck through the crowd. As the lights went out once more, the horrified audience were left with something to tell their friends about...

Where Jack Baker excelled was in promotion. He and his team brought a fresh imagination to the selling of spook shows. Prior to his arrival in town, miniature graveyards would pop up, while newspapers and radio advertisements made outlandish promises. As well as the threat of meeting Frankenstein's monster 'in person', the promo ads often promised a visit from

BELA LUGOSI'S SPOOK SHOWS

Playing the Count in Tod Browning's 1931 film of *Dracula* – a part he'd had to fight for despite having played it on stage for years – made an instant icon of Bela Lugosi, but his star quickly faded. Lugosi made some great films in the early-1930s, but by the 1940s he was all but washed up, appearing in Poverty Row B-movies.

Lugosi returned to the stage to play *Dracula*, took over from Karloff in the stage play *Arsenic and Old Lace*, and then joined Neff's spook shows in 1947. He reprised his role as *Dracula* in his 1948 'A Nightmare of Horror' show. This led to vaudeville appearances and night club tours in which Lugosi traded on his *Dracula* image to bring in the crowds: it was a short step to fronting midnight spook shows.

From 1950, the actor was on the road with 'Bela Lugosi's Big Horror and Magic Stage Show', which saw him perform scenes from *Dracula*, introduce magician Dr Montez, operate the bloody guillotine and bury the vampire maiden alive. The stage show filled an hour, and one of Lugosi's B-movies would run for the second hour. After a 1951 UK revival tour of *Dracula*, Lugosi was back on stage in his 1952 'Spook Show Tour'. By 1954, he was playing Vegas (at the Silver Slipper Saloon) in 'The Bela Lugosi Revue', still touting himself as 'Dracula in person'.

Only Lugosi's death in 1956 put paid to his further exploitation of the spook show phenomenon. His live routine was partially preserved in a 1953 edition of television's *You Asked For It*.



"Garganta, the Giant Gorilla" and suggested the performance would "separate the MEN from the BOYS!". Such ballyhoo was par for the course for carnivals, but the horror spook shows put a new macabre spin on things. Contests offered the unlikely prize of a "real dead body" to the winner (the 'body' being that of a frozen chicken!), while fake protest groups were 'put up' by Baker to picket the theatres he was playing, provoking free coverage in the local paper.

Baker was also efficient. The screening of a horror movie as part of the performance filled an hour or so. To maximise his box office, Baker would book out two venues – in one, the live stage show would come first, followed by the film, while in the second the film played first, giving Silkini and his gang time to complete their first show and hot foot it to the next venue to provide their second live show of the night. In this manner, he was able to double El-Wyn's nightly box office, often bringing in as much as \$6,000 in each town.

In 1943 Baker finally met his match in a confrontation with a true-life monster. It was nothing supernatural, not a vampire or a werewolf: he was defeated in his face-off with Universal's legal department, who sent the showman a cease-and-desist notice. Barker was banned from using Frankenstein's monster in his live show, as he'd duplicated the creature's look from Boris Karloff's image, designed by Universal's make-up man Jack Pierce. He'd even employed Art Dorner, Karloff's Frankenstein screen stunt double, to play the role.

They went to court, and the studio won. Other movie-inspired creatures, like King Kong knock-off Garganta, temporarily filled in, until Baker came to terms with Universal and licenced the Frankenstein monster design. After all, he was making more than enough at the box office to afford it, even if he had to run the legal notice: "Direct from Hollywood by Special Contractual Agreement with Universal Pictures, Frankenstein – in Person!"



HERITAGE AUCTIONS

ABOVE: Ray-Mond's spook shows promised monsters that would "run loose in the audience". LEFT: Bill Neff and his Madhouse of Mystery was another long-running spook show act.



Baker toured Dr Silkini's Asylum of Horrors across the United States for two decades, with up to seven individual troupes operating during the 1950s, playing in over 40 theatres each week (magician James Randi was one of the alternative 'Dr Silkini's'), finally giving up the ghost in 1963. He left the spook shows behind, but continued other mainstream magic performances, touring these shows to whatever venues would have him, from carnivals, fairgrounds and circuses to supermarket parking lots. He was often hired to perform at store openings, special events, or local festivals as he always drew a crowd. That kept Baker busy until his retirement in 1969.

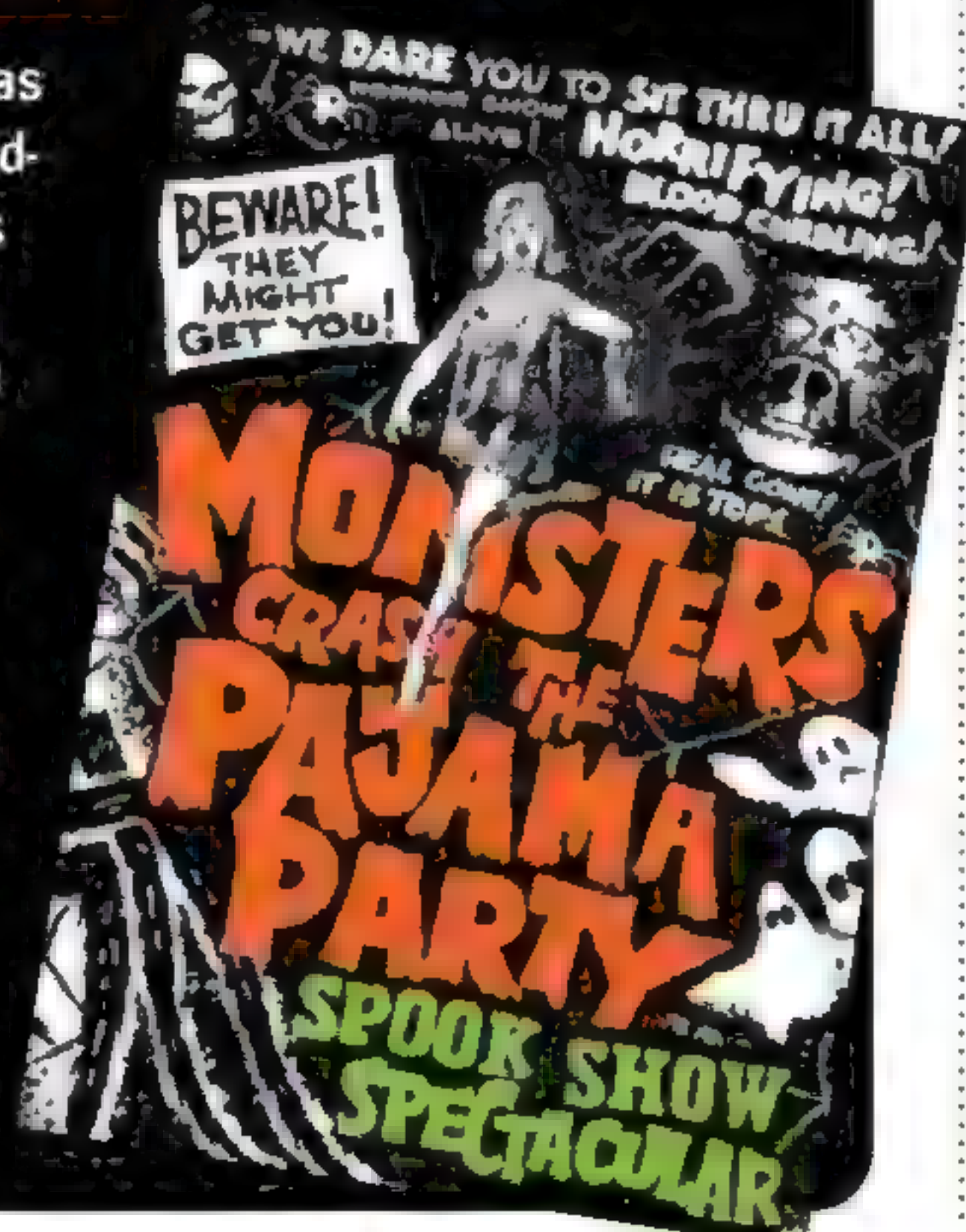
HEX APPEAL

The war years saw a slowdown in the spook shows, with many shutting up shop. Then, from 1945 onwards, they sparked back to life, just like Frankenstein's monster, with a more gruesome focus as a result of the battlefield carnage. The original 1930s horror films were cheap to hire, so *Dracula* (1931), *The Mummy* (1932), *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and *The Wolf Man* (1941) became spooky time fillers (they'd later perform the same role on television in the 1950s in the US syndicated 'Shock Theatre' package that spawned a generation of 'monster kids').

One of the biggest post-war spook show operators was Ray-Mond, known as Raymond Corbin in civilian life. His 'Zombie Jambo-ree' toured the States continuously from

SPOOK SHOW FILMS MONSTERS CRASH THE PAJAMA PARTY

A 30-minute short, 1965's *Monsters Crash the Pajama Party*, was written and directed by David L Hewitt. Hewitt wrote the low-budget 1964 science fiction movie *The Time Travelers*, but this was his directorial debut, created specifically for live spook shows. The film featured teenagers who dare one another to spend the night in a haunted house, only to encounter a mad scientist who is transforming humans into gorillas. During an interval, a monster-costumed actor emerged from the screen to menace the live theatre audience. Released on DVD in 2001, *Monsters Crash the Pajama Party* featured a pre-title spinning spiral that aimed to 'hypnotise' the viewer, while the DVD menu was packed with clickable icons accessing hidden extras. Hewitt directed more low budget films, including *Journey to the Centre of Time* (1967) and *Dr Terror's Gallery of Horrors* (1967).



THE BALLYHOO KING: WILLIAM CASTLE

Writer-producer-director William Castle was the PT Barnum of late-1950s, early-1960s horror cinema, ably spoofed by John Goodman in Joe Dante's 1993 comedy *Matinee*. It was seeing Dracula himself, Bela Lugosi, on stage at the age of 13 that gave Castle his calling. He got his start in Hollywood aged 23, but it was only after years of routine westerns and crime thrillers that he hit on his unique ballyhoo; the films weren't up to much, but the hype Castle created was effective.

With *Macabre* (1958), he offered a \$1,000 life insurance bond for anyone scared to death, and from then on Castle's movies each came with a unique gimmick. *House on Haunted Hill* (1959) lifted a trick directly from the spook shows: luminous skeletons would fly over the heads of the audience. *The Tingler* (1959) saw the title monster set loose among the audience (another spook show staple), with cinema seats wired to provide mild electric shocks

to unsuspecting patrons. In 1960, *13 Ghosts* equipped audiences with their own 'Ghost Viewer,' a pair of red/blue 3D-style cardboard glasses through which they could selectively see the spooks. In 1961, *Homicidal* introduced the 'Fright Break', a 45-second pause allowing those faint of heart to scarp before the scares began. Castle effectively drew upon and adapted the many tricks of the spook shows for the cinema screen.



1946 through to 1953. Going several steps further than the good-natured knockabout of Dr Silkini, Ray-Mond's gruesomeness recalled the Grand Guignol horror stage performances of 19th century Paris. Ray-Mond played a blood curdling mad scientist who operated live on stage, sparing no expense for fake blood. Drawing on classic magic illusions, Ray-Mond seemingly decapitated a volunteer from the audience, running into the crowd brandishing the severed head in one hand while wielding his blood-soaked surgical knife in the other! His Ghost Show ads promised "Spooks that walk! Ghosts that talk! Come, even if your heart is weak!"

Ray-Mond's other chilling offering was his 'Blood-Curdling Voodoo Show', a "Show of 1001 Horrors" where "Monsters run loose in the audience". Ray-Mond promised a unique line-up of "Weird Women! Unearthly Creatures!" These monstrosities would "leave the stage and sit in your lap", offering any single men in the crowd "Ghoul Friends with hex appeal!" Much of Ray-Mond's ballyhoo aimed at shaming the frightened into attending, lest their girlfriends think them 'sissies'. "Are you a MAN or a MOUSE?" queried one promotional poster.

One operator who continued through the war years was Bill Neff, with his 'Madhouse of Mystery' show that ran until 1952. Neff had grown up alongside Hollywood star



ABOVE: The long-running 'Zombie Jamboree' saw Ray-Mond as a mad scientist and plenty of fake blood.

James Stewart in Indiana, Pennsylvania, with the pair operating a stage act together during their High School years. Neff went on to become a professional magician and, having seen El-Wyn in action, he quickly jumped onto the spook show bandwagon. The 'Madhouse of Mystery' saw Neff encoun-

ter Dracula's daughter, adapting the oft-seen trick of locking a women in a box then sticking sharp swords into it. Emphasising the playful nature of the horror on offer, Neff's ads proclaimed: "It's scary! It's scream! It's screwy! Shake with laughs – shiver with suspense – tremble with thrills! See the

Goddess of Voodoo – a zombie nightmare with hex appeal!” That ‘hex appeal’ pun was clearly popular on the spook show circuit.

It was Neff who first recruited the genuine Dracula – movie star Bela Lugosi, who’d fallen on hard times – to join his live spook show. Lugosi became part of Neff’s numerous attractions during 1947, and his image, done up in his iconic Dracula make-up and cape, dominated the advertising. So successful was this that Lugosi branched out on his own, taking his signature style on the road in his own vampire-branded spook show (see p.33)

SPOOK SHOWS RIP

The traditional spook shows began to decline as the ‘swinging Sixties’ arrived. There were still performers on the road, re-running the greatest hits of spook shows past, including Dr Evil (Philip Morris), who pushed the gruesome elements further than ever before. With the Vietnam war in full swing, the spook shows had their work cut out to keep up the fun-but-fearsome thrills of old: real-life horror was invading the living rooms of Americans every evening on television news.

As a result, the spook shows grew bloodier, the effects more complex – and yet somehow the thrills diminished. There was still enough interest in the mid-1960s for the production of a bespoke interactive movie created especially for use by live spook shows, 1965’s *Monsters Crash the Pajama Party* (see p.34). As more and more ‘movie palaces’ and large theatres shut down across America, so there were fewer venues equipped or willing to book the dying spook shows.

When *The Exorcist* (1973) became a screen phenomenon (see FT313:30-35), the now lame magic tricks, pun-filled presentations and guys in monster masks of the live spook shows looked distinctly old hat. Morris, who as Dr Evil had embraced television during the 1960s with *Dr Evil’s Horror Theatre*, limped on until his final stage performances in 1977; he died in 1980.

However, the concepts behind the classic spook shows didn’t disappear entirely. In the 1970s, rock performers Alice Cooper and KISS brought horror elements to their live concerts. Later groups like Mortis, Slipknot, Lordi, and GWAR built on these traditions, as did individual performers like Marilyn Manson. The spook show mutated, but it lived on, even in the magic performances of Penn and Teller and stunt performer David Blaine, whose schtick came straight from Jack Baker.

Television horror hosts – like Vampira, Zacherly, and Elvira – encapsulated the spook show experience (spoofed in *Fright Night*, 1985). Joe Dante’s *Matinee* (1993) paid homage not only to the monster movies of the 1950s, but to the cinematic gimmicks pioneered by William Castle (see p.35), which themselves were inspired by the ballyhoo of the traditional spook shows.



TOP: Dr Evil Philip Morris made the transition from live spook shows to television with *Dr Evil’s Horror Theatre*.

ABOVE: Television horror hosts, like Vampira, were a natural development of the spook show experience.

Even something like interactive performances of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* or Fox TV’s notorious ‘documentary’ *Alien Autopsy: Fact or Fiction?* (see FT395:32-36) employed the promotional gimmicks and ballyhoo familiar from the old spook shows. Who knows, even in the digital age, the traditional spook show might be ripe for one final resurrection...

FURTHER READING

Abbott’s Magic Presents, *Target: Midnight: The Incredible Story of the Midnight Magic Spook Shows*, Abbott’s Magic, 2022.

Beth A Kattleman, ‘Magic, Monsters, and Mov-

ies: America’s Midnight Ghost Shows’, *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 62, No.1, March 2010, pp.23-39.

Mark Walker, *Ghostmasters*, Cool Hand Communications, 1994.

♦ **BRIAN J ROBB** is the *New York Times* and *Sunday Times* bestselling biographer of Leonardo DiCaprio, Johnny Depp and Brad Pitt. He has also written books on silent cinema, the films of Philip K Dick, Wes Craven and Laurel and Hardy, the *Star Wars* movies, and Walt Disney, as well as science fiction television series *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek*. He is a Founding Editor of the Sci-Fi Bulletin website and lives in Edinburgh. He is a regular contributor to *Fortean Times*.



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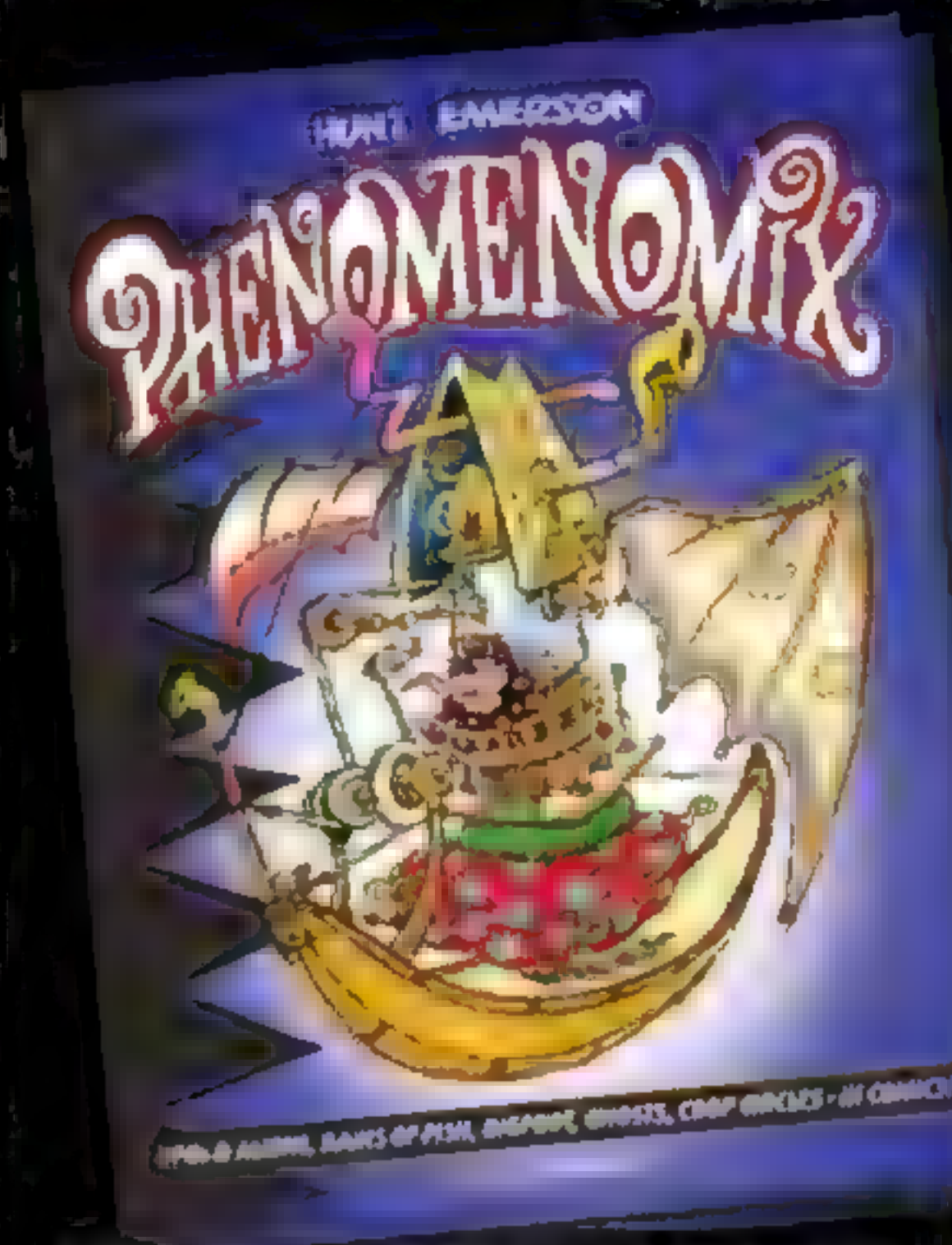


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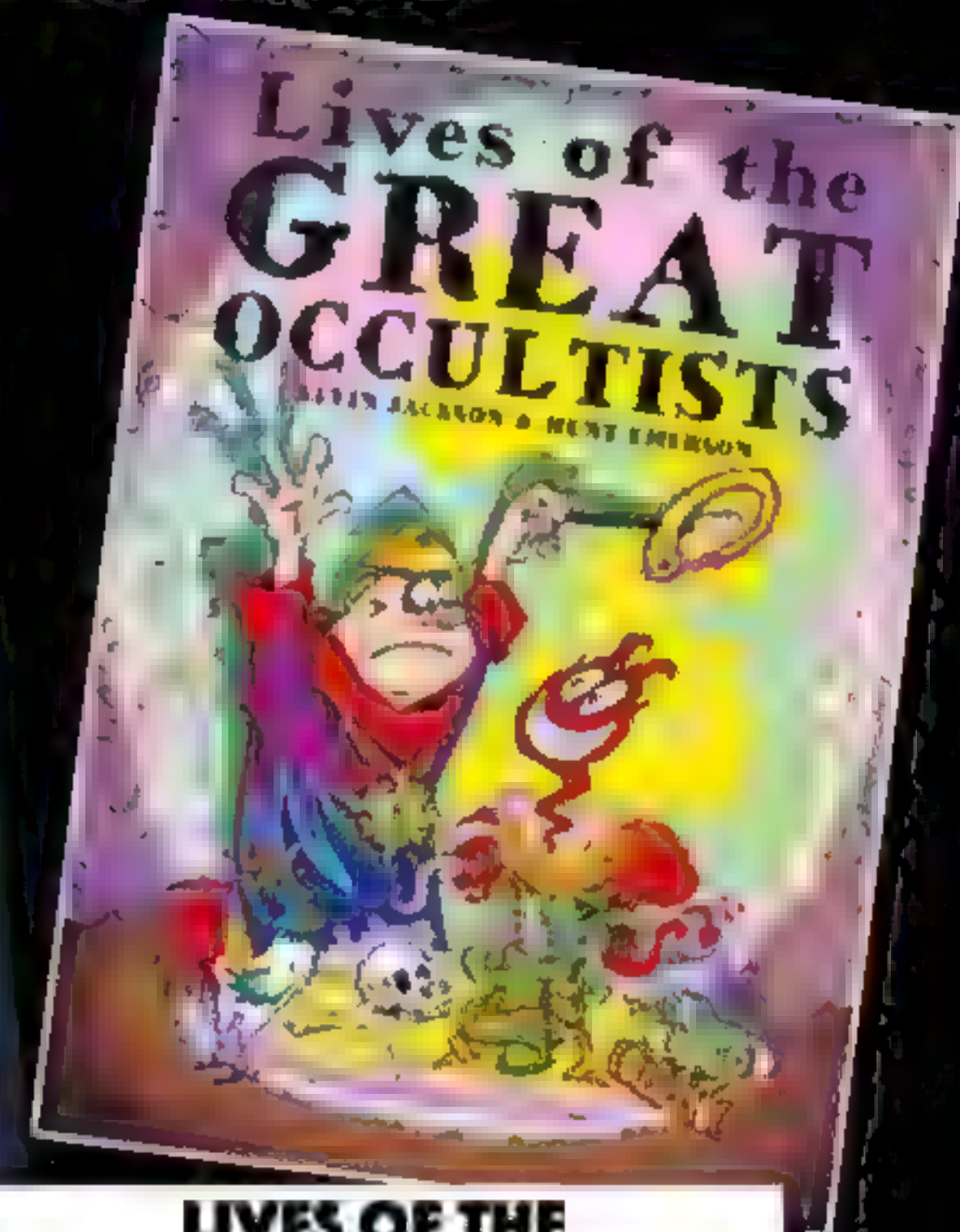
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STATE OF THE SPECTRAL NATION

DR PAUL LEE shares the results of a survey he undertook into the UK's haunted sites, and paints a depressing picture of disappearing spooks, over-hyped accounts of paranormal activity and greedy ghost hunting groups charging the public inflated fees.

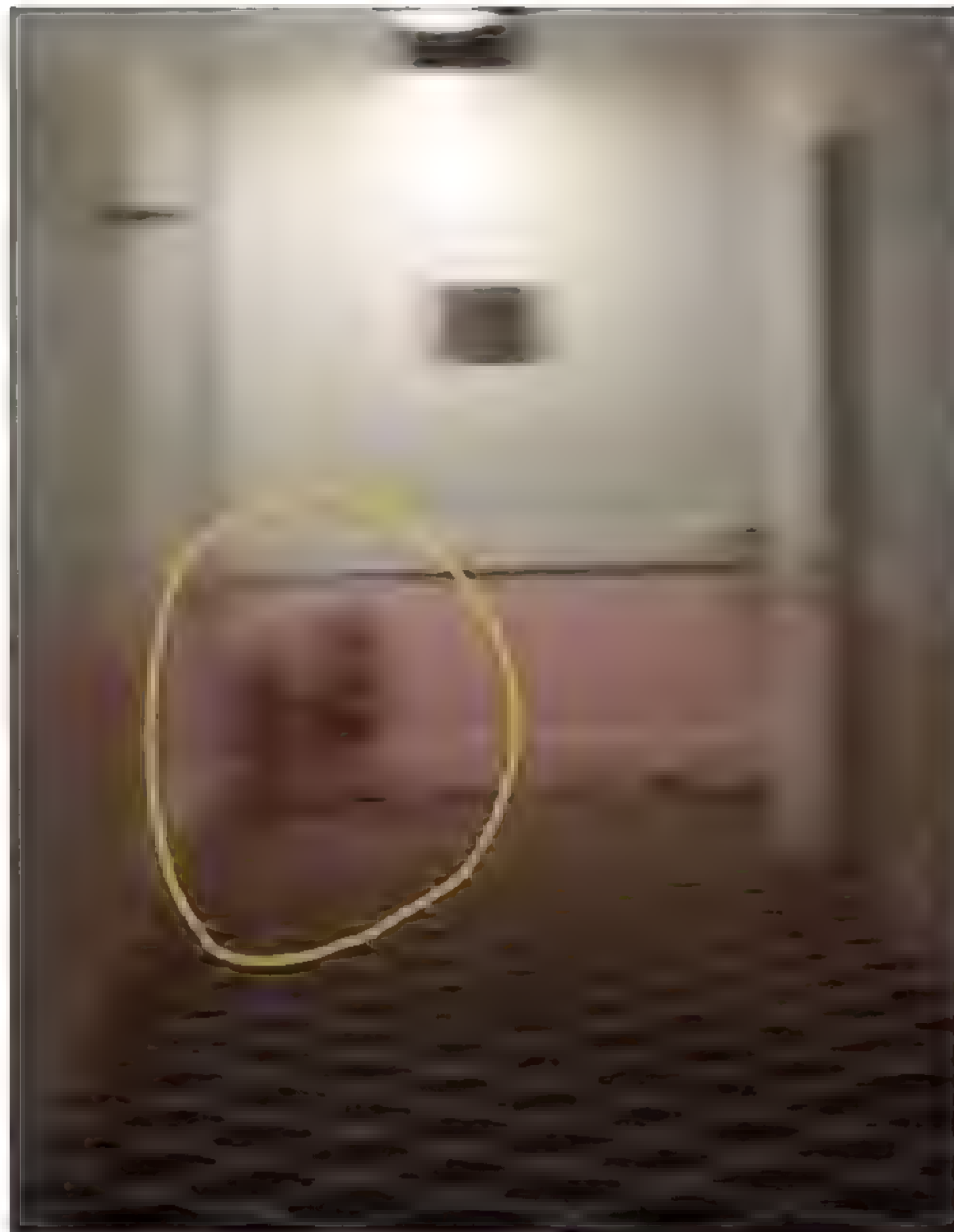
Before the advent of popular televisual forays into ghost hunting in the early 2000s (see FT342:54-55), investigations into the nature of ghosts were confined to a relatively small number of teams across the globe. Ghost hunters were happy to sit in the darkness, clutching their thermometers, cameras, notepads and tape recorders, and record the smallest occurrence, hoping to obtain a clue or proof of survival, with the contentious issue of 'orbs' being the only thing to disturb the status quo.

Then everything changed. Groups, pre-armed with confirmation bias, would enter reputedly haunted locations *expecting* to find ghosts – and in nearly every instance, that is exactly what they discovered. The smallest sound, sensation or incident, normally ignored in any other location, would be presented as “compelling proof” of ghosts. Vague shapes would be published in papers; the word ‘pareidolia’ was never uttered. Press reports veered into the territory of pure bunkum: a photo said to show ‘The Green Lady’ in Glasgow’s Scotia Bar turned out to be the light of an exit sign; two out-of-focus shapes in Liverpool’s Adelphi Hotel were compared to the spooky twins in *The Shining*... until it was pointed out that it was a snap of some fire extinguishers.

SHOW ME THE EVIDENCE!

Coincident with this boom in credulity was the adoption of codswallop contraptions. The appearances of a new, untested gadget in a TV show was all the endorsement required, and no thought was given as to its suitability for ghost hunting. A familiar part of the ghost hunter’s arsenal is the EMF meter, but some makes are susceptible to interference from mobile phones and leaky microwave ovens: the results they give can also be highly dependent on how they are held – and yet we see them being waved around like sparklers.

EVP, or electronic voice phenomena, are the aural equivalent of orbs, and usually submerged in an overarching mass of noise. Plenty of perseverance (not to mention imagination) is required to discern anything. In an example of ‘lead-



LEFT: ‘Spooky twins’ straight out of *The Shining* photographed in Liverpool’s Adelphi Hotel; they turned out to be a pair of fire extinguishers.

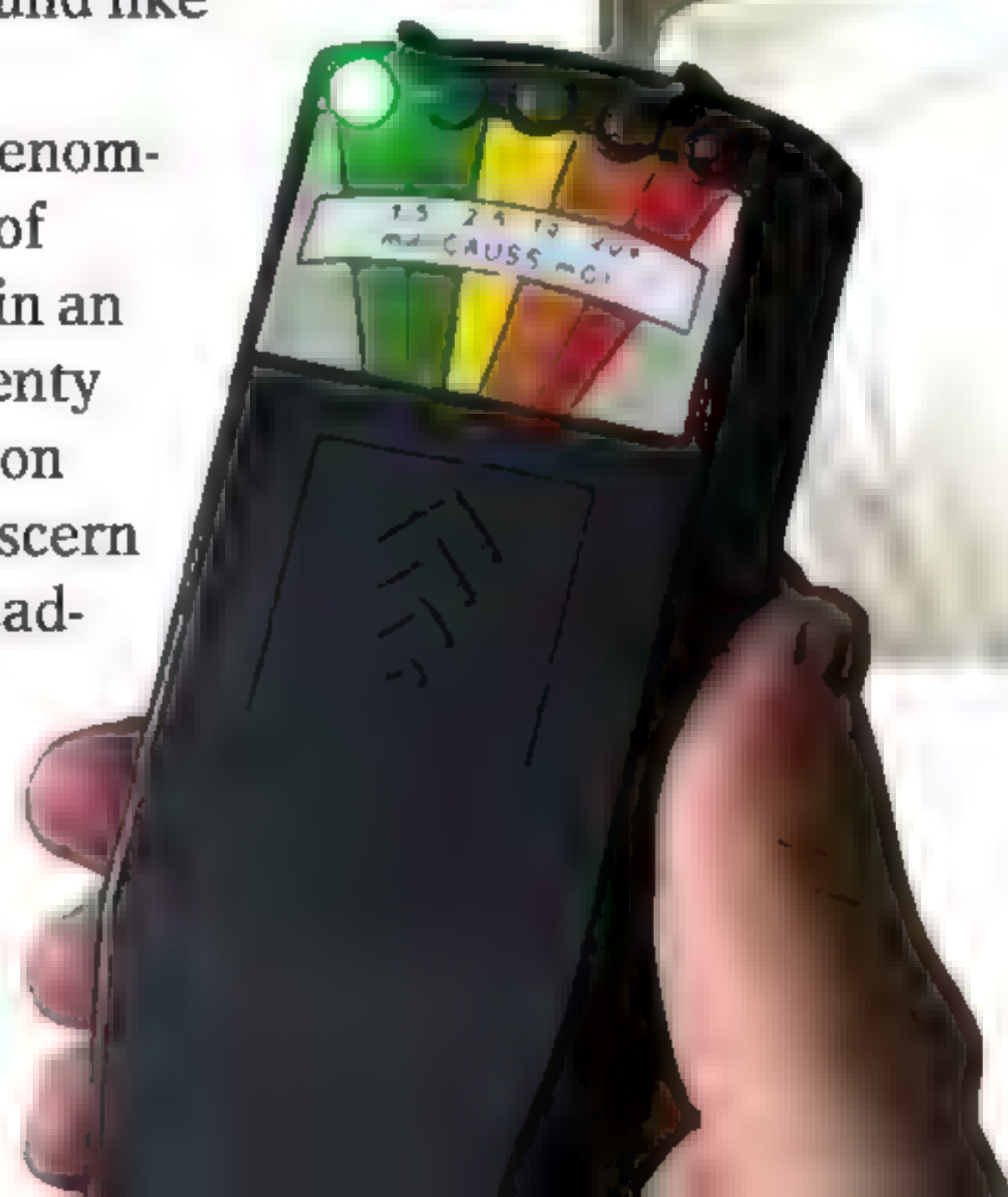
BELOW: Television shows like *Ghost Hunters* have helped sales of ghost hunting gadgets like the EMF meter shown at bottom left.

ing the witness’, people are told what they are expected to hear before the recording is played back, and of course there is then agreement, regardless of the clarity. Ideally, people should record their observations independently of one another. These recordings should not be considered as evidence unless they are crystal clear and no trace of contamination by interference can be detected, but usually there is an absence of critical analysis and the EVPs are simply accepted. There are cases on TV where ‘researchers’ are shown manipulating audio software until something coherent is obtained. One wonders if the operator has any training in acoustics, as the impression is that the various controls are operated quite randomly. This does not inspire confidence that the final results are genuinely paranormal.

In short, there is no point using equipment if there is no appreciation for how it is to be used, how it works or even how it might produce false positives. Amateur groups simply assume that their equipment is free from flaws, even if it is used in a manner for which it was not designed.

These groups of ‘Most Haunted Wannabes’

SOME MAKES OF
EMF METER ARE
SUSCEPTIBLE TO
INTERFERENCE
FROM MOBILE PHONES



are almost entirely medium- or psychic-led, everything else being window dressing. But how much verification is performed on the resultant utterances, assuming that they derive from means other than normal research techniques? How much of the information is simply accepted as factual? Is it a matter of people preferring the mystically obtained information over the provenance of actual historical documentation? And how much is pure fraud like the notorious Derek Akorah/'Kreed Kafer' incident? (For the full story of Akorah's 'possession' by an entirely fictitious spirit, see FT390:24-25)

Not too far from where I live is Bircham Newton, where three dead airmen are said to reunite in the old squash court. It has been known for a long time now that the information given in 1971 by attending mediums is completely bogus and that the crew never existed; and yet the story is often repeated. Even worse, the basic tale is embellished. Based on psychical visits, and an unclear photograph, we are told that the girlfriend of one of the airmen was on board a doomed flight and perished with the three airmen. The word of the psychics is accepted, unquestioningly.

At nearby Castle Rising, the ghost of Queen Isabella is said to be a demented wraith, screaming into the night. But there is nothing in the record to indicate that her mental health degenerated in her later years. Far from it: she seems to have been *compos mentis* to the end. The same tired tales get paraded again and again, with no corroboratory research being done.

With this litany of 'evidence' proffered by ghost groups and excitable publications, audiences are constantly regaled with declarations that their own hometown is the most haunted in the UK and, indeed, that the UK is the most haunted kingdom in the world.

Is it, though? Just how replete is the UK with spectres? Perhaps a survey could determine the answers...

SURVEYING THE SPOOKS

There is an abundance of allegedly haunted locations tabulated in books, newspapers, online and, of course, in the personal experiences recorded by witnesses over the years. Conceivably, all of these locations could be contacted and the stories associated with them assessed for genuine 'ghostliness'.

The sheer scale of such a project was daunting. I found over 5,000 sites listed, but not all were contactable or likely to reply (roads, ruins, hospitals and so on.) This tally was whittled down to 4,000 and then reduced by another 1,000 when no form of contact (email/website/Facebook page) could be ascertained. I also focused on locations that had had some form of ghost report in the last 40 years.

I initially estimated the survey would take a year to complete; in the end, it took two and a half years, as Covid lockdowns meant that venues were unable to answer my queries. Some replies continued to come in after the end of the survey, but these did



ABOVE: Hampton Court – guilty of ghostly hypocrisy? BELOW: The Dog and Partridge in Bury St Edmunds was worried about opening “portals to the less understood and also dangers of the Unknown”.



not affect the results. The tardiest reply was Dartford's Royal Victoria and Bull Hotel, who said they had “lots [of ghosts] ... too many to list.” One might have hoped for more after a 16-month wait.

To ease analysis, the list was broken down into categories: pubs/clubs, hotels/b&bs, museums, and so on. Results varied from place to place, as not everywhere replied to my messages. On average, the response across the categories was 40 per cent. Included in the numbers are places that had given recent interviews to journalists.

Most responses boiled down to a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’, while others were vague (“I haven’t seen anything myself, but I have heard that my staff have...”). I wasn’t interested in replies that said that ghost hunters had obtained positive results, and I explained that I was only interested in the experiences of staff and customers as they went about their day-to-day business. My attempts to obtain further information were often met with silence.

A few locations tried to generate an air of mystery. The Dog and Partridge in Bury

St Edmunds spoke of not wanting to risk “another shift in [the] parameters of [badly intentioned spirits] as it may open up more portals to the less understood and also dangers of the Unknown... our force is strong within.” While at Sheffield's The Old Queen's Head, I was told: “I am not asking, and no one is saying anything...” And that was the end of that.

No respondents were rude, but a few did flirt with the boundaries of politeness. Pluckley's The Dering Arms said that they didn't get involved with ghost hunters: “The haunted stuff just brings idiots to the village. Ten customers all sharing one coke and all using the toilets... not for us!” Sandringham House in Norfolk responded with notable pomposity, seemingly disgusted that I'd had the temerity to contact them about their spectres.

The Maid's Head in Norwich obviously found the subject of ghosts to be so abhorrent that they wanted me to help in expunging the record of their phantom claims. Obviously there had been a change in management, as they had been happy to speak to a paranormal magazine in 2005.

My exchanges with Hampton Court were bizarre. Tour guide Ian Franklin (now retired) had ascertained from records that the most famous ghosts were almost certainly inventions from the Victorian era, possibly used to drum up publicity; the remaining stories were almost exclusively far less spectacular. But when asked, a customer services advisor told me that they “do not allow paranormal investigations” in order to protect their valuable items from damage. I told them that I was purely interested in staff and visitor reports, but the mantra of “we do not allow paranormal investigations at our sites” was merely repeated. It was frustrating that they simply ignored my point – and yet every year we see Hampton Court repeating the same tired, and almost certainly untrue,

MICHAEL COPPINS / CREATIVE COMMONS

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ABOVE LEFT: Least Haunted? Ettington Park Hotel seems to have shed its spooks, with none reported for years, but still appears in outdated lists of ‘Most Haunted’ properties. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The Cellar Bar in Stamford can boast either an impressive list of phenomena or no sightings at all, depending on who you ask.

tales about Catherine Howard running down the Long Gallery and so on.

Some venues I contacted were disappointing for other reasons. Glasgow’s Tron Theatre seemed keen to chat but deferred contact due to upcoming Christmas shows. After a suitable period of waiting, contact was again attempted, but with no reply. It was therefore upsetting to find that they had instead become involved with a team they obviously regarded as having a better pedigree: The *Spooked Scotland* TV series. Michelham Priory in Sussex didn’t respond to my survey, even though I was twice told that the property manager had been made aware of it. It was galling to find that, meanwhile, they had granted interviews to the press and, of course, regularly hired out the building to ghost hunting groups.

But a few venues did provide fascinating tales, sometimes resulting in reams of correspondence or lengthy phone calls.

What was fascinating was the nature of the stories. The majority of locations reported poltergeist-like activity, with very few recognisable human or animal forms being visible, and only black shapes being seen, usually human-sized and observed out of the corner of the eye. The most spectacular instance was at the Llindir Inn in Henllan, Wales. Here, the manageress was at the bar serving a few farmers when a massive black shadow rushed through the front door and into the back room; a search revealed nothing – and all three witnesses saw the same thing.

The quantity of experienced phenomena varied, with the majority of activity at the locations being fairly mundane: footsteps, interference with electrical equipment and so on. There were exceptions, with one of the best examples being Stamford’s The Cellar Bar. The manager regaled me with

THE CENTRE'S BAR MANAGER TOLD ME THAT IN HIS 25 YEARS THERE HAD BEEN NO SIGHTINGS

an impressively long list of phenomena experienced during his tenure, from 1997 to 2018. He also told of some encounters in the main body of the Arts Centre, which had not been mentioned previously. But the manager of the whole building, whose time overlapped that of the bar manager, told me that in his 25 years there had been “no sightings anywhere”. One wonders who is telling

the truth.

The keeper at Berwick Town Hall also denied any “manifestations of uncleanness”, even going so far as to question the accuracy of a paranormal researcher who had quoted him.

One gratifying aspect of the survey was the number of new locations it threw up, mainly via proprietors who said: “Nothing here – but did you know about my last place?”

A number of sites that frequently appear on ‘Most Haunted’ lists, such as The Ettington Park Hotel, told me that nothing had been reported for many years. It was abundantly clear that most listings of haunted sites are woefully out of date and are probably just recycled. Indeed, some places on newspaper lists have now changed

		Tallied Statistics	
Venue type	Contactable venues	Yes/probably	No/Probably not
Pubs & clubs	1020	183	17
Hotels, b&bs etc.	733	85	153
Restaurants	73	15	15
Royal ghosts	33	4	6
Tea rooms/coffee shops	30	6	9
Cinemas	0	1	0
Roman ghosts	3	0	1
Government & Council	35	2	11
Theatres & Music Venues	144	20	43
Museums (including art galleries & libraries)	220	38	110
Mansions	183	12	64
Castles	134	19	47
Miscellaneous	358	32	113



STINGLEHAMME / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE LEFT: The Llindir Inn in Henllan, Wales, provided fascinating reports of shadowy figures and poltergeist-like activity. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Glasgow's Tron Theatre didn't manage to respond to the survey, but were happy to get involved with the *Spooked Scotland* television programme.

names, been repurposed, closed or even been demolished. One wonders what could be gleaned if English Heritage, the National Trust or the press were willing to do some original research.

So, what are the results? The trend would seem to be clear and the basic figures are reproduced in the table on the previous page.

As one can see, in many of the categories the number of "no/probably not" responses was significantly larger than the "yes" replies. So why are more places not reporting their phantom residents? There are of course a number of reasons. Reports of hauntings may have been fictitious, merely rumours or hoaxes conducted to enhance trade.

Or the ghosts may have become dormant or extinct. Or the businesses may consider ghosts to be too low-brow or even damaging to business: we have seen possible examples of this above. Or perhaps the respondent's own personal beliefs may play a role; although it was amusing to receive responses from people who claimed to have no belief in ghosts, but admitted that they had witnessed phenomena that defied explanation.

Looking at these numbers, it would seem that the number of ghosts reported in the past has been massively overstated. They may have been there once, but things have been quiet for many years, if not decades.

It was striking to hear, many times, that the spectral status quo has altered only very recently.

SELLING SPIRITS

Coupled with the above survey, I also took the opportunity to inquire further about the ghostliness of various properties, but this time from an entirely commercial standpoint. Using a separate, fictitious profile, and posing as a prospective customer who wished to hire the venues for ghost

hunting activities, I inquired of locations that frequently appeared on the inventory of companies who offered ghost hunting tickets to the public. These were the ones aimed at the 'Most Haunted Wannabes' and using the same clichéd come-ons: "Dare you join us?" and the like.

When I made enquiries about costings, numbers and timings, a fair number of places that hadn't responded to my original queries about their ghosts were only too happy to get back quickly with hire fees; which leads to the depressing conclusion that they are only in it for the money. That, of course, is their prerogative. There was also a greater response than to my other survey.

The credibility of certain venues as genuinely haunted sites was certainly diluted by the impression that they might 'enhance' their location's reputation in order to entice ghost hunters. Surprisingly, some places that admitted to me (as a ghost hunter) that they had no activity to report appeared on commercial listings complete with exciting tales of ghostly phenomena. Had the original owners embellished the spooky stories to ensure that they would be hired, or had the hiring company done so? Either way, the truth appeared to be somewhat malleable. Also offered by many venues or organisers were 'pre-investigation tours' showing the most noted haunted spots, thereby influencing the expectations of the participants.

One surprising realisation was that many venues themselves charged reasonable fees for access, usually £10 per person or less. Most did ask commercial ghost groups for public liability insurance, references from previous locations, a deposit and sometimes a health and safety plan. But it seems that after the commercial groups had secured the location, the prices were extortionately, and sometimes scandalously, enhanced.

An excellent example is a small museum in King's Lynn that charges £200 for 30 people plus staff, so approximately £5.70 per person. The same place is often advertised by ghost groups at a rate of £35+ per person. The few groups that have replied to me via Facebook about this and similar price hikes, all give the same excuse; this is to cover insurance, expenses, websites and advertising costs. But this expenditure is normally spread out over the year and not just for one venue and surely cannot justify a pricing differential of over 600%. The true reason is simple: profit.

One wonders how many of the venues themselves actually know of the hikes. A few places did inflate the prices themselves. For instance, a venue in Newcastle-upon-Tyne used to charge £50 per group in 2003 and offered access for some nine hours for about 20 people. By 2022, the fee had increased to £395 per group for four hours, rising to £1,095 for 11 hours. There were plenty of similar examples. It's clear that such prices would deter many genuine researchers. Obviously one eye was being kept on the balance sheet rather than on the EMF meter.

The advent of televised ghost hunts has obviously made proprietors of reputedly haunted properties and organisers of commercial ghost hunts aware that they can generate huge sums from the gullible, and this shows no sign of abating. With the cost of living crisis sapping the nation's finances, prices remain steep and ghost hunting threatens to become an astronomically expensive pastime.

♦♦ **DR PAUL LEE** is currently working on two books, an expanded version of his west Norfolk ghosts volume and a gazetteer of over 900 haunted UK pubs. His website is www.paullee.com

A FEAST OF BEASTS

ANDREW SCREEN goes back to the long, hot summer of 1976 and the original broadcast of Nigel Kneale's *Beasts*, a horror anthology series with a rich background of fortean themes and influences.

I didn't realise it at the time, but 1976 would be an exceptional year, both historically and personally. The summer was the stuff of legends, the standard against which all subsequent heat waves have been measured. Between 23 June and 7 July temperatures reached 32°C each day, and on five days exceeded an uncomfortable 35°C. For the nine-year-old me it was a time of warm squash, space hoppers, chopper bikes and cut-off denims set against a backdrop of drought, biblical ladybird swarms, melting motorways and water rationing. It was also the year that Nigel Kneale's ATV anthology horror series *Beasts* was broadcast (both the weather and the programme are lodged firmly in my memory), although by the time of transmission the heat had broken and the rain fell.

Having cut ties with the BBC, Kneale had written an episode of the anthology series *Against the Crowd* in the form of "Murrain" (broadcast 27 July 1975), a tale of a modern day rural witch hunt with deadly consequences. The production cemented a firm working relationship between Kneale and producer Nicholas Palmer and together they pitched the idea of a horror anthology with an umbrella theme "of the mystifying influence of animals, usually malevolent and menacing, in eerie circumstances."¹ After being given the green light the pair would originate one of Kneale's most outstanding creations outside of *Quatermass*, a series that had a profound impact on many who saw it at the time, including me. For the past six years I have been researching the production background and the cultural and fortean influences that fed into the stories, and have discovered that it has a rich heritage.

DURING BARTY'S PARTY

The first episode in front of the cameras, "During Barty's Party", taps into the wave of muromphobia that was gripping the nation,



LEFT: The stark opening titles of *Beasts*. BELOW: An ATV publicity sheet for "During Barty's Party" mentions 'super-rats'.

fed by sensational tabloid newspaper headlines. Kneale crafted an increasingly claustrophobic tale of a couple trapped inside their home by a swarm of hungry rats, though the viewer never actually sees any of the rampaging rodents. Kneale later recalled: "What was interesting to me was it was like making *The Birds* with

no birds – in this case it was rats with no rats. The rats were purely sound, you never saw one, and it was only through the superb acting of the two principals that the thing worked. It was entirely in their minds and their eyes."²

Kneale was probably aware of the newspaper headlines spreading alarm about the decreasing effectiveness of rat poisons and the growing population of rodents in the years before the episode's broadcast. The problem resulted from the Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act of 1962, which banned the use of strong poisons and led to an increasing use of Warfarin, an anti-coagulant which prevents the blood from clotting. When administered to rats, it causes massive internal bleeding, killing the rodents within days. At first it was an efficient method of vermin control, but reports soon appeared indicating a growing immunity to the poison among the rat population. Perhaps the most sensationalist news report from this period was carried by the *Daily Mirror*: "Rats Eat Baby Girl" screamed the front page.³ The article revealed that "A baby found dead in her cot had been partly eaten by rats". No wonder the public feared the rise of the rat. Just seven days before Kneale completed his script for the episode, the newspapers were still reporting on the rat menace:

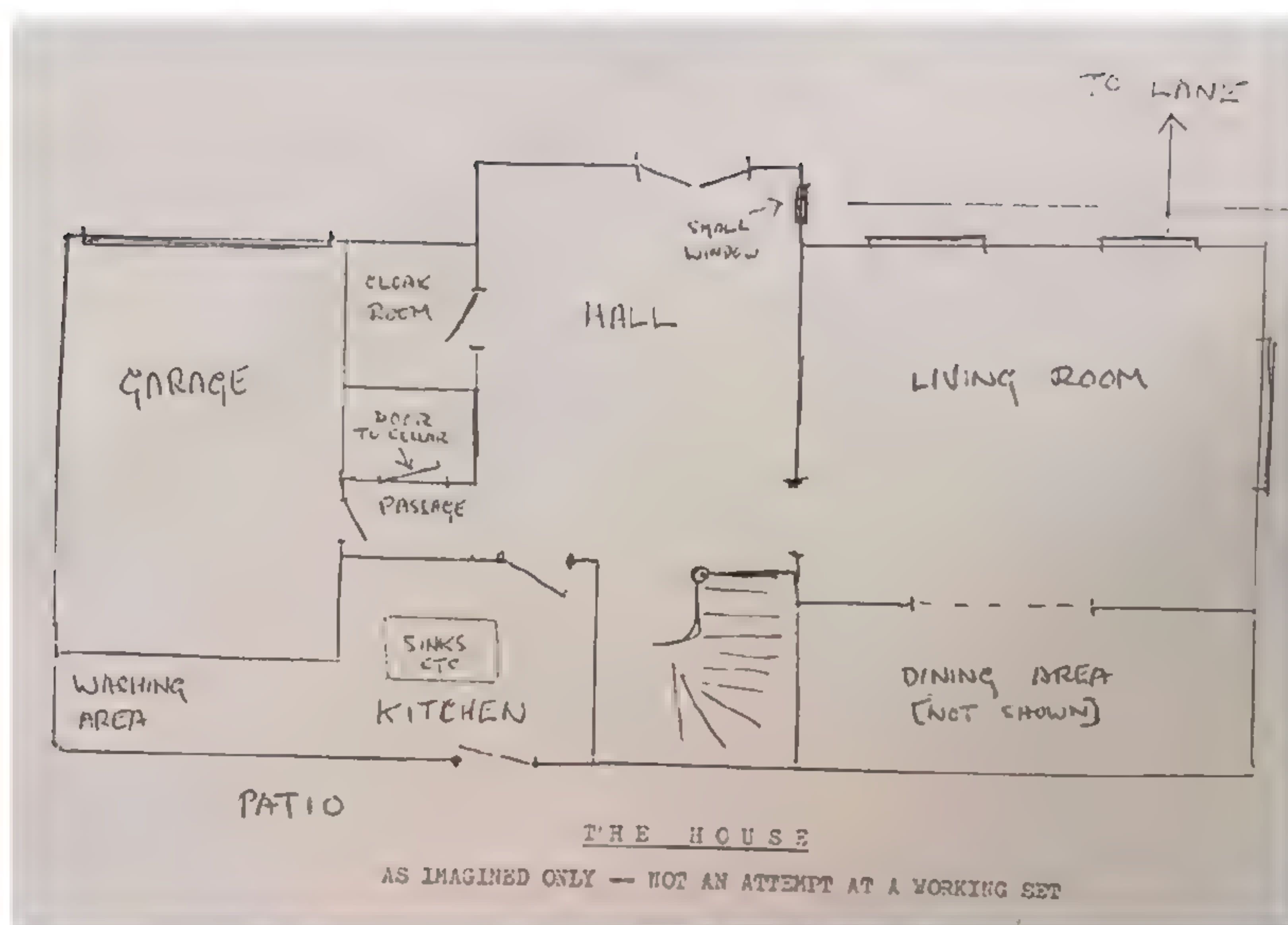
**BEASTS WAS A SERIES
THAT HAD A PROFOUND
EFFECT ON MANY WHO
SAW IT AT THE TIME,
INCLUDING ME**

ATV
Network
Limited

Whereas animals can be cuddly, friendly and faithful, beasts are different. Beasts can never be understood; beasts are unpredictable; beasts are what we are afraid of meeting in the night; beasts belong to the dark; we encounter beasts when we least expect to; and the most terrible of all beasts is the one that hides within ourselves.

"During Barty's Party" is a lot of talk nowadays about 'super-rats', a breed of rats that are the same size as normal rats but are immune to poison. They have become very adaptable and the story deals with what could happen if this adaptability goes a stage further.





LEFT: Kneale included with his original script for *During Barty's Party* a sketch of how he saw the layout of the Truscott's house. BELOW: Elizabeth Sellars and Anthony Bate as Angie and Roger Truscott. ABOVE RIGHT: A newspaper clipping announcing the death of London Dolphinarium performer Sonny Boy.

Sad tale of clown called Sonny Boy

Evening News Reporter

ONE of the stars was seriously ill. But like a true trouper the show had to go on. The audience little realised that the comedian's and clowning had kept them laughing would soon come to an end.

Today the sad news was broken to his thousands of fans both young and old. "We regret to announce that Sonny Boy, one of the stars of the London Dolphinarium is dead." Sonny Boy died just after midnight. Near him were his two faithful trainers who had sat by his private pool around the clock. We are all terribly sad, said Press officer Mrs. Stephanie Denham.

LISTLESS

We knew Sonny had been unwell for about six weeks. He lost weight, was of his food and seemed listless. The only thing which made him happy was being in the show. We didn't have the heart to take him out. Today a joyful sea lion called Pebbles was moved in with Sonny's playmate Lucky, who was already missing his pal. Kneale had a very close



Two of the stars at the London Dolphinarium.

cheer him up," said Mrs. Denham.

Sonny's death is still a mystery — although dolphins do suffer from heart-ache or psychological problems sometimes — almost like humans.

"Super rats are on the march — and the only things that may stop them are cats and the illegal gin trap. This warning was given yesterday in the *British Medical Journal*. It said that the rat population was increasing, and now most were resistant to the poison warfarin... the journal says that laws banning cats from food shops and gin-traps from farms may have been a mistake." ⁴

Kneale may have also been drawing upon events on the Isle of Man in the 1930s, when he would have been a teenager. The island was experiencing an increasing problem with the number of rats and newspaper reports of the time detailed the efforts of the island's government to combat it: "War has been declared on rats in the Isle of Man. A conference of local authorities is to meet shortly at Douglas to decide tactics. It may consider encouraging the breeding of Manx cats to reduce the rats for tailless cats have a high reputation as ratters." ⁵ The war would rage for several years, though the cause of the increase in the rodent population was given a surprising explanation:

"Rats, which originated from Soviet Russia, are causing the farmers of the north of the Isle of Man a great deal of trouble. These Russian rats invaded the Isle of Man some years ago when a large Russian barquentine [a kind of ship with three or four masts] ran aground near the Point of Ayre. Rats were seen to leave the ship in hundreds, and soon firmly established themselves on the Manx farmsteads. As might be imagined, these rats are of a reddish colour, and like good Communists they quickly set up an upheaval in the communities in which they planted themselves. They drove the greyish coloured Manx rats from the haunts where they had held sway for years and took possession of everything edible they could find... The Manx farmers tell

KNEALE MAY HAVE BEEN DRAWING ON EVENTS ON THE ISLE OF MAN IN THE 1930S



stories of destroyed potato and oat crops; damage to chickens, ducklings, and even such things as wooden ladders, which have been gnawed through. One of these rats it is stated, will do more damage in a week than the old native Manx rats will do in twelve months. The red rats have increased so rapidly that they have become a menace to the farmers of the Isle of Man." ⁶

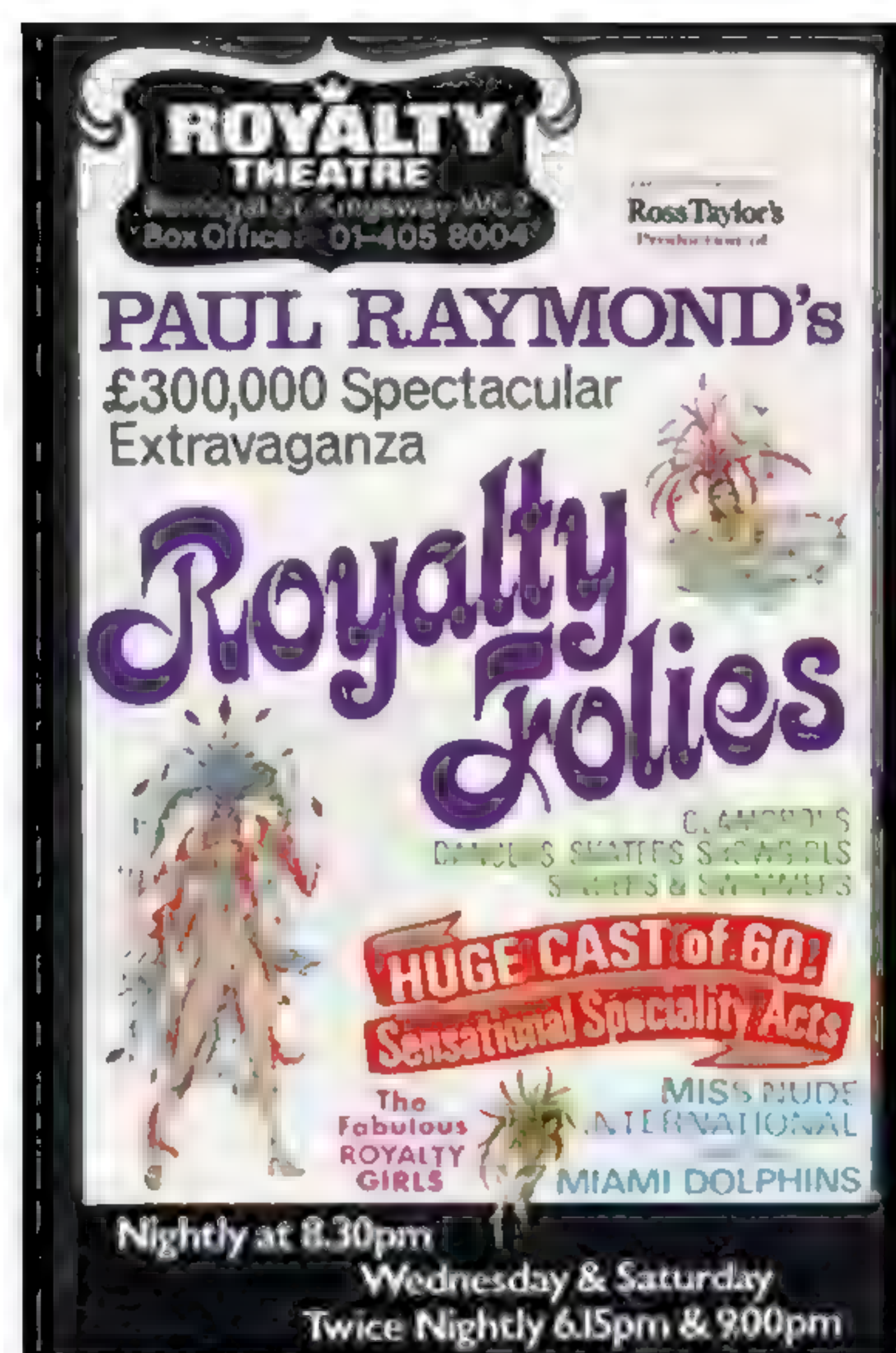
BUDDYBOY

After the dramatic heights of "During Barty's Party" the next episode to be shot was the distinctly odd "Buddyboy", a ghost story set in the world of adult entertainment featuring a phantom cetacean. Kneale may have been inspired by one of the more

unusual theatre hauntings reported from the Royalty Theatre (now the Peacock Theatre) on Portugal Street, London, ⁷ where the ghost of a dolphin, known as Flipper, manifests as a "spectral squeaking, not unlike a crying baby, to be heard desolately wailing by its now abandoned and rusted prison". ⁸ The story dates back to the early 1970s, when two dolphins were kept in a tank beneath the theatre stage as part of a Paul Raymond revue, ⁹ and performed in the tank, which would be raised up to stage level. The dolphins would swim around in the 10,000 gallon tank and perform tricks, including removing bikinis from young women. An urban myth has grown up around the animals that says they were housed there permanently before eventually dying of neglect.

The Raymond revue dolphins, called Pixie and Penny, performed at the theatre from April to June 1974. In real life they were well cared for during the production and relocated after the show closed, first to a dolphinarium at Woburn in Bedfordshire, before transferring to Flamingo Park Zoo in Yorkshire from 1975 to 1977. Neither dolphin died at the theatre; both died in 1977 from a viral skin disease which they had contracted while touring Taiwan. ¹⁰ Nevertheless, the myth and legend of the theatre haunted by a dolphin has remained and grown in the intervening years. Given the timing of the original revue it is possible that Kneale was aware of the myth that sprang from it and incorporated this into his script. The idea of animal hauntings is nothing new, but the idea of a phantom dolphin is rare, if not unique.

As well as the Peacock Theatre's unusual ghost, another dolphin death, at a once popular London tourist attraction, may have figured in the creation of "Buddyboy".



ABOVE LEFT: Jimmy (Stuart), Hubbard (Wolfe Morris) and Dave (Martin Shaw) in the haunted dolphinarium of "Buddyboy". ABOVE RIGHT: An advert for Paul Raymond's 1970s Royalty Follies; an urban myth grew up around the show's dolphin performers. BELOW: The decline of the 1970s British film industry in "The Dummy"

Dolphinariums were popular attractions in British seaside towns during the 1970s, from Brighton to Morecambe, with more than 30 examples dotted around the country containing around 300 dolphins.¹¹ The London Dolphinarium opened at 65 Oxford Street in 1971 with its star attraction of a pod of dolphins: Brandy, Sparky, Lucky, and Bonny, supported by Pebbles the Sea Lion and a waddle of penguins. The animals would perform in pantomimes like *Robinson Crusoe on Dolphin Island*, alongside 'aquamaids' who swam with them. The performance regime was gruelling, with eight shows a day beginning at 11am and continuing every 90 minutes all the way through to a final one at 9.30pm. The London Dolphinarium came in for severe criticism due to the paucity of its facilities, with the dolphins housed in a tank that was only three metres deep, 14 metres long, and five metres wide. The attraction closed in 1973 following the death of one of the dolphins, Sonny Boy, who died of unknown causes. The dolphin's demise seems to have been conflated with the Peacock Theatre revue show in the collective memory, with several modern sources stating that the dolphins performed saucy routines with the scantily clad 'aquamaids', which is not accurate.

The existence of the London Dolphinarium and the Royalty Follies revue demonstrates the popularity of this type of entertainment during the 1970s and how Kneale was possibly inspired to base a ghost story in such an unusual environment. The name of the deceased London Dolphinarium cetacean, Sonny Boy, is not too far removed from the eponymous phantom of "Buddyboy" and possibly provides the biggest clue as to where Kneale might have gained inspiration for what is perhaps the most unusual episode of *Beasts*.

THE DUMMY

The series' third episode was "The Dummy", which depicts a deadly spiral of events in a film studio during the shooting of a horror film, detailed with the knowing eye of a writer who had been involved in such a production. Hammer made five films based on Kneale's work, and he later noted that the episode was "based on the shooting of a Hammer film, which is one of the most uproariously funny things I'd ever seen. They were always terribly cosy, ladies knitting in corners, making tea amid the blood and gore".¹² Kneale's episode is a commentary on the sorry state of the British film industry in the mid-1970s.

Kneale summed up the issue in 1982: "In this country the [film] industry is

moribund, apart from spin-offs – even those *Quatermass* films were spin-offs, don't forget. In a sense we've never had a real, native industry except for short periods when Hungarians or millers put some strength into it. Not like the French or Italians. At best ours was a kind of appendage of the American – and it's still like that. The English special effects teams seem to be blossoming as never before, servicing American projects in British studios. Perhaps the smoke and slime come cheaper here."¹³

Hammer and other British film productions relied on deals with American producers or production companies for funding and distribution. When this funding source began to dry up, the industry went through a period of prolonged contraction from



GHOST

SALESGIRL FAINTS
AS SHE SEES
THE BI-CARB
FLOAT ON AIR

By Daily Mail Reporter

A GHOST closed down a new supermarket - style Co-op shop yesterday.

The manager, Mr. Derek Bird, and his staff refused to carry on serving after the ghost played its twentieth supernatural trick in a week.

And 16-year-old salesgirl Adrienne Bramley, who fainted when the bi-carb was spirited across the shop for the sixth time, said:

"I am never going to set foot in the shop again until the thing is destroyed."

Last night the vicar of Long Wittenham, Berkshire, the Rev. Cecil Roberts, held a service in the shop in the village high street to try to exorcise the ghost.

Mr. Bird, 33, said: "My staff and I have reached breaking point.

If the vicar cannot make the ghost go I shall go myself. I cannot stand any more."

The strange goings-on in the Co-op started eight days ago when the shop lights began going on and off.

Then groceries began moving about mysteriously. Cereals turned up on the detergent shelf. Sweets went into levitation.

And packets of bi-carbonate of soda kept disappearing from a shelf and reappearing on a window-ledge.

When Mr. Bird challenged the ghost aloud to stop the clock which hangs on the shop wall, the clock stopped immediately.

His chief assistant, Mrs. Joyce Stania, shouted: "Smash the clock!" A few hours later the clock was found shattered.

Security men from the Co-op headquarters at Oxford have examined the shop to make sure the ghost, which villagers believe is the spirit of a woman who died 200 years ago, is not a practical joker.



ABOVE LEFT & BELOW: 1962 news reports from the *Daily Mail* and *News Review* on a haunted Co-op. ABOVE RIGHT: Briteway Billy: a cousin of Gef the Talking Mongoose?

which it never really recovered and "The Dummy" is set during these desolate years. The titles of the Dummy films featured in the play - "The Dummy", "Horror of the Dummy", "Death of the Dummy", "Return of the Dummy", "Dummy and the Devil", and "Dread of the Dummy" - mimic not only the decline of the various Hammer film series, but also look forward to their modern equivalents such as *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Hellraiser*. Like these franchises, the Dummy titles suggest a decline in the quality of material as ideas are stretched to breaking point. The character inside the monster suit, Boyd, foreshadows the careers of more recent well-loved horror actors, such as Robert Englund and Doug Bradley, who are forever tied to their memorable monster roles and assigned a cruel fate: to don their monster costumes for decades in various sequels, remakes, and spin-offs of varying quality. What Kneale observed in the 1970s in "The Dummy" would ring just as true in the decades afterwards.

SPECIAL OFFER

The next story in production order is usually summarised as 'Carrie in a supermarket'. The comparison is a lazy one, as the story is not a copy of Stephen King's work, though it does take in similar cultural influences. Brian De Palma's film adaptation of *Carrie* was released theatrically on 3 November 1976, after the transmission of the episode, and King's novel had been released in April 1974. Given the timeframe there is a possibility that Kneale read a copy of the book. The framework of the script is similar, but the focus is very different, with none of the religious subtext found in King's story. It is far more likely that Kneale, who had used telekinesis in other stories as far back as

SHE BLAMES EVENTS ON A STRANGE FURRY CREATURE THAT ONLY SHE EVER GLIMPSES

Groceryman Hopes Britain's First Supermarket Ghost Has Vanished

LONG WITTENHAM, England (UPI)—Derek Bird opened up shop today with high hopes that Britain's first supermarket ghost has stopped shifting his groceries and disappeared.

"I feel a happier man," said Bird, manager of the local supermarket. "I think the vicar has well and truly laid the ghost."

The "ghost" started its tricks on Monday last week and has appeared, says Bird's staff, in the form of a white flash. It is said to have moved packets, tins and a customer's order book off shelves and smashed the clock on the store wall when challenged aloud to do so.

Store assistant Adrienne Bramley, 16, fainted for the sixth time in eight days Monday with its 20th supernatural trick—the removal of the window sill of some bicarbonate of soda placed on a shelf a few moments earlier by Bird.

She and chief assistant Mrs. Joyce Stania refused to go back to work until "the thing" was destroyed.

Bird thought it was about time the Rev. Cecil Roberts, vicar of this Berkshire village, was informed. So he closed the supermarket and went off to arrange an exorcism.

Roberts performed the service Monday night in the shop's storeroom, saying prayers for 15 minutes in the presence of Bird and Mrs. Stania. They hope it got rid of the "the thing," which some locals hold was the ghost of a woman who died 200 years ago.

Bird said today was the first time in nine days that he had gone into the supermarket and found everything in its right place. Mrs. Stania, too, said she felt a happier person. Miss Bramley was having a few days off to recover.

The vicar said he believed faulty electrical wiring accounted for lights flashing on and off without apparent human intervention. But the other incidents could only be supernatural, he said.

Education Week Theme Of Green PTA Meeting

American Education Week was featured on the program of the Green PTA at its recent meeting, correspondent Mary Weikum reports. Invocation was given by Al Cummings.

After a short business session, Mrs. Whisker, third grade teacher, gave a report on the language

advertising mascot, called Briteway Billy. Here, Kneale may have again been drawing upon his childhood on the Isle of Man. In the autumn of 1931 he was nine years old and his father, William, was editor of the newspaper *Mona's Herald*, one of several Manx newspapers to feature stories of a talking mongoose named Gef (see FT269:32-40, 315:18-19, 353:34-39, 436:32-35, 56-59 for the full story). It is likely that the young Kneale was aware of the story, especially as his father's newspaper featured extensive commentary on the bizarre tale. The parish of Patrick (in Manx Perick) where the Irving family's cottage was located is steeped in tradition, with folktales and myths handed down from generation to generation, resulting in a rich understanding and belief in many Manx legends. When the story of Gef broke, it was often reported by the island press in terms that related to this mythology, accepting Gef as an extension of local mythical animals.

Perhaps the connection between Gef, *Beasts*, and Kneale's body of work can be stretched too far, but as far back as 1949 when Kneale published his collection *Toma to Cain and Other Stories*, novelist Elizabeth Bowen was already making the connection in her introduction to the book:

"This writer is a young Manxman. He has grown up in, and infuses into his stories, an atmosphere which one can cut with a knife. He is not dependant on regionalism - not all of his work has an Isle of Man setting - but it would appear that he draws strength from it... Is the Talking Mongoose a sore subject with the Isle of Man? That interesting animal - of which the investigations of the late Harry Price never entirely disposed - might well be the denizen of a Nigel Kneale story." ¹⁴

Quatermass and the Pit, was tapping into a swelling public interest in the phenomenon, just as King was in America, and the two stories developed independently of each other.

In "Special Offer" Pauline Quirke plays Noreen, who is at the centre of strange happenings in an everyday supermarket. She blames events on a strange furry creature that only she ever glimpses, and which also happens to look very similar to the store's



ABOVE: Pauline Quirk as Noreen in "Special Offer". BELOW: Patrick Magee in "What Big Eyes".

Before we leave this episode, Kneale biographer Andy Murray contacted me with an intriguing newspaper clipping of an incident in a supermarket that made the headlines in 1962. It is worth sharing when considering sources of inspiration for "Special Offer", or to demonstrate that, whatever scenario a writer can create, they are often just a mirror for real life events.

"A ghost closed down a new supermarket style Co-op shop yesterday. The manager, Mr Derek Bird, and his staff refused to carry on serving after the ghost played its 20th supernatural trick in a week. And 16-year-old salesgirl Adrienne Bramley... fainted when the bi-carb was spirited across the shop for the sixth time... The strange goings-on in the Co-op started eight days ago when the shop lights began going on and off. Then groceries began moving about mysteriously. Cereals turned up on the detergent shelf. Sweets went into levitation. And packets of bi-carbonate of soda kept disappearing from a shelf and reappearing on a window ledge. When Mr Bird challenged the ghost aloud to stop the clock which hangs on the shop wall, the clock stopped immediately. His chief assistant, Mrs Joyce Stania, shouted: 'Smash the clock.' A few hours later the clock was found shattered. Security men from the Co-op headquarters at Oxford have examined the shop to make sure the ghost, which villagers believe is the spirit of a woman who died 200 years ago, is not a practical joke.¹⁵

The case was picked up by American newspapers around a fortnight later with *The Oregon News Review* providing a more detailed account and a resolution to the case.

Drek [sic] Bird opened up shop today with high hopes that Britain's first su-

permarket ghost has stopped shifting his groceries... 'I think the vicar has well and truly laid the ghost.' The 'ghost' started its tricks on Monday last week and... is said to have moved packets, tins and a customer's order book off shelves and smashed the clock on the store wall when challenged aloud to do so. Store assistant Adrienne Bramley fainted for the sixth time in eight days... She and chief assistant Mrs Joyce Stania refused to go back to work until 'the thing' was destroyed. Bird thought it was about time the Rev. Cecil Roberts, vicar of the Berkshire village, was informed. So he closed the supermarket and went off to arrange an exorcism. Roberts performed the service on Monday night in the shop's storeroom, saying prayers for 15 minutes...



Bird said today was the first time in nine days that he had gone into the supermarket and found everything in its right place. Mrs Stania, too, said she felt a happier person. Miss Bramley was having a few days off to recover. The vicar said he believed faulty electrical equipment accounted for lights flashing on and off without apparent human intervention. But the other incidents could only be supernatural, he said.¹⁶

WHAT BIG EYES

For the fifth episode of *Beasts*, "What Big Eyes", Kneale turned his attention to a traditional monster from the world of horror, the werewolf. Kneale's tale returns to the roots of lycanthropy as a psychiatric disorder to paint a portrait of failed ambitions and misplaced faith in the powers of belief. Patrick Magee's character in the play, Leo Raymount, has an unshakeable faith in his experiments, which he believes will turn him into a wolf. This, in turn, has an effect upon his own (and his daughter's) behaviour and thought processes, allowing them to subconsciously construct a mind-set and rationale for their actions. The story is not a mere updating of the werewolf legend, rather a study in confined delusion, the power of madness, and how blind faith can shape destinies.

This shared psychotic disorder has a real-life pedigree in the form of a recognised syndrome named folie à deux, a rare condition characterised by a shared delusion among two or more people in a close relationship. The inducer has a disorder which influences another individual, known as the induced, until they come to believe the delusions of the inducer. We can see Patrick Magee's character as the inducer and his daughter as the induced. The syndrome was first identified in the 19th century by French psychiatrists Charles Lasègue and Jules Falret and in recent years has been termed a shared psychotic disorder or induced delusional disorder.



ABOVE LEFT: The front page of the original script for "Baby". ABOVE RIGHT: A mummified creature is discovered bricked up in the walls of an isolated cottage.

BABY

The final episode before the cameras, "Baby", is possibly the best remembered alongside "During Barty's Party". Again, echoes of Gef can be detected in the story-line, which sees a couple in an isolated cottage finding a mummified creature hidden in the walls of the building during renovations, a creature that is possibly a witch's familiar. Kneale often used the motif of something hidden or buried that resurfaces to bring forth terror in the modern era. This most obviously feeds back to the Martian capsule in *Quatermass and the Pit*, but also draws upon the stories of MR James, such as "The Treasure of Abbot Thomas". James was a favourite author of Kneale's, and it is in "Baby" that this is most blatant. Kneale replaces the typical James figure of the scholar or educated outsider with that of a vet: both figures strive to uncover the secrets behind their discoveries and in doing so seal their own fate or that of those around them. The past can haunt the present, reaching across the years and centuries, and in doing so can wreak havoc in modern times. As in other *Beasts* episodes, Kneale's tale draws on a variety of influences and interests. He must have had an interest in, or a passing knowledge of, apotropaic finds such as witch bottles, witches' familiars, and mummified animals discovered within the walls of old buildings. The term apotropaic is derived from Greek

HOGGARD STATES THAT SUCH THINGS CAN BE TRACED BACK TO MEDIAEVAL TIMES

and means to ward off or to turn away; it is applied to any object or markings that may be intended to prevent evil, curses, or bad luck. However, what is found in "Baby" is used to enable the opposite. The sealed jar in the story is designed to curse the house, its inhabitants, and the surrounding land: it is used for darkness. While the jar has no real-life parallel in documented finds, it takes its cues from existing artefacts and combines them to produce something that feels authentic and possible.

Researcher Brian Hoggard is the UK's leading expert in objects that have been concealed within the structure of a building (see FT415:22, 435:21). In his book, *Magical House Protection*, Hoggard states that such things can be clearly traced back to mediæval times', but that in the main "substantial

amounts of evidence (come) from the 17th century onwards. Part of the reason for this is simply down to the quantity of buildings from the period which have survived, an-

other part will be due to the survival of the materials over time." ¹⁷ The house in "Baby" is hundreds of years old, perhaps dating from the time of the persecution of witches between the 16th and 18th centuries. Was the jar placed in the wall during this era? Perhaps it was a final act of vengeance by a persecuted practitioner of the dark arts? We are never given the answers in the story, but, as Kneale noted about MR James, we are given enough information to make our own conclusions.

Not all the objects that have been found within buildings can be said to have been placed there for the purpose of protection or good luck. There are many records of items being used for quite the opposite reason, linked to dark or black magic. In *Magical House Protection*, Hoggard devotes a chapter to the reverse of apotropaic objects – that is, objects hidden within the fabric of buildings for ill intent. An example he describes chimes with the discovery of the jar in "Baby": "At the Church Inn, Church Lane, Prestwich, workmen discovered that there was a bricked up alcove in the cellar. When they removed the wall they discovered a small bag containing three carved wooden female figures... There was also found a pile of vegetable matter and a dried cat. It would appear that some kind of ritual was being enacted, using roots or other plant matter, a sacrificial cat and these figures." ¹⁸

The items, including a mummified animal, being concealed within an alcove inside a wall that was then bricked over, closely resembles the find in Kneale's play. Perhaps he had heard stories of similar items, linked to dark magic, discovered within the walls and floors of buildings and used them as a basis for "Baby".





ABOVE: Jane Wymark as Jo in "Baby", probably the best remembered episode of *Beasts* – it was unforgettable nightmare fuel for many viewers back in 1976.

WE ARE THE BEASTS

Animals are obviously the linking theme and influence for all the tales, but was Kneale *really* discussing one animal in particular? He later reflected on the series and the true meaning of its name in a note I found in his personal production folder. "*Beasts* started out as a private venture in pattern breaking. Half a dozen separate plays, with nothing in common but an overall title and in this case, of course, the writer... all have some creepy element, but that would be the limit of similarity and it would have to work in totally different ways. Predictability became a naughty word. There would be an 'animal connection' as they called it in the panel game, but more specifically 'beasts' to denote the alarmingly irrational. Since human beings can be as irrational as most creatures, the stories should be first of all about what people do to each other."¹⁹

We are the beasts.

NOTES

- 1 ATV *Beasts* publicity brochure, 1976, p.3
- 2 'Beyond the Dark Door' interview by Andrew Pixley, *Time Screen* Issue 8, December 1986
- 3 Paul Connew, 'Rats Eat Baby Girl', *The Daily Mirror* (May 23, 1970), p.1.
- 4 'Bring Back the Cat, to Catch Rats', *The Daily Mirror* (April 21, 1975), p.9.
- 5 'Manx Rats', *Hull Daily Mail* (March 22, 1935), p.13.

6 'Manx Folk Ratty Over Red Rats', *Belfast Telegraph* (March 2, 1936), p.5.

7 The Peacock Theatre was previously known as The Royalty Theatre.

8 'About us', Sadler's Wells, <https://www.sadlerswells.com/about-us/history/the-peacock/> (last accessed July 5, 2017).

9 Paul Raymond (1925–2008), dubbed the 'King of Soho', was a strip club owner, pornographic publisher, and property developer who opened the UK's first ever live striptease nightclub. Steve Coogan portrayed him on screen in the 2013 biographical film *The Look of Love*.

10 'Royalty Follies', UK Dolphinarium Archive, <http://ukdolphinarium.blogspot.com/2015/07/royalty-follies-london-1974.html> (last accessed June 8, 2023). The website also features photographs of the revue and a reproduction of the souvenir programme from the show.

11 The Human Aquarium website (humanaquarium.co.uk) provides a nice clear history of dolphinariums around the UK. Brighton Dolphinarium first opened in 1968. Marineland in Morecambe opened four years earlier in 1964. I have strong memories of visiting Marineland in Morecambe during the long hot summer of 1976 and watching the animals perform various acrobatic routines. This added an extra layer of realism when I first watched "Buddy-boy" on its original transmission.

12 Richard Hollis, 'TV Zone', *Starburst* 59 (July 1983), p.41.

13 Bruce G Hallenbeck and John McCarty, 'Nigel Kneale's Quatermass Phenomena', *Little Shoppe of Horrors* 7 (December 1982), p.33.

14 Nigel Kneale, *Tomato Cain and Other Stories* (Collins, 1949), foreword by Elizabeth Bowen, pp.3-4.

15 'Ghost – Salesgirl Faints as She See the Bi-Carb Float on Air', *Daily Mail* (November 27, 1962). Thanks to Andy Murray for supplying the clipping.

16 'Groceryman Hopes Britain's First Supermarket Ghost Has Vanished', *The News Review [Oregon]* (December 4, 1962).

17 Brian Hoggard, *Magical House Protection* (Berghahn Books, 2019), p.xi.

18 Hoggard, *Magical House Protection*, p.132.

19 'Beasts by Nigel Kneale' undated single page document found in his production file for the series.

For more on Nigel Kneale, see **FT218:28-29, 4188-35** and **434:52-53**.

♦ ANDREW SCREEN is a Special Educational Needs practitioner by day and a writer on film and TV by night. He has written for *Action TV*, *We Are Cult* and *Horrid Magazine* and *Creeping Flesh: The Horror Fantasy Film Book* vols 1 and 2 (Headpress, 2003, 2005). He was nine when he watched *Beasts* on original broadcast and it had such an impact on him that he has spent the last six years writing and researching *The Book of Beasts: Folklore, Popular Culture, and Nigel Kneale's ATV Horror Series* (Headpress, 2023).

Pursued by ghosts: my haunted houses

JAN BONDESON looks back at his haunted homes past and present.

When I was a youngster, I lived and worked as a junior doctor in southern Sweden. Apart from the family home in the city of Malmö, I had a flat of my own in the university town of Lund. As might be expected, neither had any spectral inhabitants. After getting my PhD in 1996, I obtained a scholarship to the renowned Kennedy Institute of Rheumatology in west London. Since the inflated London property prices meant I could not buy a proper house, I had to make do with a two-bedroom Victorian flat at 273 Fulham Palace Road. The flat was just 10 minutes' walk from the research institute, but otherwise its situation was not the most pleasant: busy main roads to the front and side, a large school behind, and the flight path to Heathrow above. Whenever the Concorde flew overhead, there was a loud rattle from the unmodernised single glazing. Such a plethora of noise was not conducive to any paranormal visitors of an evening, and 273 Fulham Palace Road would remain ghost-free throughout my residence there.

In early 2001 I achieved my promotion and became a senior lecturer and consultant rheumatologist at Cardiff University, moving from London to South Wales. I purchased a large semi-detached house at 202 Stow Hill, Newport, not far from the hospital where my clinical duties were based, and also near the teaching centre. The house, with its large empty rooms, had a spooky atmosphere. It did not take long for me to notice that a small door to a former servant's bedroom on the second floor seemed to open and shut without



human intervention. Early one morning, I heard muffled footsteps from the stairs, as if a child had entered the house. "Burglars!" I thought – but all the doors and windows were locked and secured. The stairs appeared to be empty, but the sound of the stealthy footfalls continued. There was a ghost in the house!

A few days later, my neighbours at 204 Stow Hill invited me in for an evening meal. They politely inquired whether there had been any paranormal activity in the house. The reason for this was that my predecessors in the house, a slightly dotty elderly couple, had

LEFT: A fresh-faced Jan Bondeson in London in 1996. **BELOW LEFT:** 202 Stow Hill, Newport. **FACING PAGE:** Jan Bondeson at the Priory with Billy the Pitbull, and the house's (hopefully) no longer haunted room.

for several years been very much troubled by a resident ghost. They kept two Jack Russell terriers, but when the dogs' toy balls started rolling about without human interference, it was clearly time for a medium to be called in. This individual declared that it was the ghost of a young servant girl, who had died in the house in Victorian times, and who had been very fond of dogs.

I co-existed with the ghost of Stow Hill for many years. It was not the kind of ghost that jumped out without warning, calling out 'Boo!', but a timid and retiring spectre. Knowing the ghost's fondness for dogs, I once brought two adult male black and white Newfoundland dogs to the house. They could clearly sense the presence of the ghost, attempting to sniff and prod at it.

I stayed at 202 Stow Hill, still living in peace with the ghost, until 2017. I had received a large legacy and decided to retire a few years early. I wanted to move to Edinburgh, a city I had always admired. Since there was a property boom on at the time, the more attractive houses sold in a matter of days. In the end, I purchased a large detached house known as the Priory, situated in the seaside town of Dunbar, 20 minutes from Edinburgh Waverley by the fast train. Constructed in 1910 for the wealthy businessman David Livingstone Bowe by the celebrated Edinburgh architect John Jerdan, it was surrounded by three acres of parkland, with many original specimen trees, including a red chestnut, two American redwoods and a variety of cedars. Mr Bowe sold the Priory in the early 1930s, when it was purchased by garage owner Colin Stark, who owned the local bus





PHOTOS: JAN BONDESON

company. A period of geriatric deterioration followed when the Priory was taken over by his elderly lady secretary, who was quite incapable of running a property of this size. In the 1990s, the wealthy Dunbar master builder David Gallacher bought and restored the Priory and lived there with his large family. His children more than once saw a ghost in one of the first floor bedrooms. The spectre appeared quite often and soon they had become accustomed to the ghost and were no longer frightened or perturbed when seeing “the Old Lady”, as they referred to it.

When I took over the Priory, the haunted room was no longer used as a bedroom, but became a gallery for Scottish art from Edinburgh and East Lothian, which the ghost could flit around and admire. Since the estate agents had not been informed that the Priory was a haunted house, I was not informed about the longstanding haunting until I spoke to the young Gallachers and heard about the ghost. I have never witnessed the spectre myself, and the Priory did not have the atmosphere of a haunted



His children more than once saw the ghost in one of the house's bedrooms

house. The ghost, unless it had been exorcised, had no objection to the collection of oil paintings in its old room, nor to the wall of paintings in my bedroom next door. In spite of its formidable reputation and the Priory's status

as a haunted house, I never saw the ghost or sensed its presence. Nor did any visitor, psychic or otherwise, feel the presence of the ghost in any manner. The Priory no longer has a reputation as a haunted house, but has entered the modern world, with its large and beautiful garden and the improvements ordered by Mr Gallacher, including a handsome fountain and a long drive to its capacious garage block. It is today the largest private house in Dunbar, but still often cannot be located by out-of-town delivery men due to its secluded position.

I am not, and never have been, a *Geistes-seher* or ghost enthusiast. Thus the Stow Hill and Priory disturbances were not due to ‘nerves’, but were genuine hauntings. The ghost of Stow Hill made itself known early in the morning, making its way down to the ground floor kitchen, where it more than once interacted with dogs in a friendly manner. In contrast, the Priory ghost stayed in its haunted first-floor bedroom and never perambulated around the house. When the Gallachers left the Priory, the haunting ceased, never to return once I had changed the use and layout of the haunted room. Although the Priory was reputed to be a haunted house for several decades, I have remained undisturbed by paranormal disturbances from 2017 until the present day.

♦ **JAN BONDESON** is a retired senior lecturer and consultant physician. He is a regular contributor to FT and the author of numerous books on fortune subjects. His latest book is *Doctor Poison: The Extraordinary Career of Dr George Henry Lamson, Victorian Poisoner Par Excellence* (2021).

The Twitter Séance

KATE CHERRELL revisits Halowe'en 2009 and tells the story of a unique attempt to contact the spirits of dead celebrities

In 2009, a séance like no other hit the headlines. The collision of technology, spirituality and celebrity culture exploded in a dramatic evening of spirit contact via the unlikely medium of Twitter.

This was set-up: via a psychic medium and scribe with immediate Internet access, celebrities from the recent past were contacted to share their wisdom and messages for their fans and family. This was of course, providing that they fitted within the site's 140-character limit. The Twitter Séance was an experiment that promised so much, revolutionised nothing and fell into obscurity as quickly as it had begun. But what the séance lacked in retweets, it made up for in sheer ambition.

The Twitter Séance, or 'Tweance', to call it by its nickname, was announced in October 2009 for a 30 October launch date, curiously missing Halowe'en by one day; perhaps it was thought that this would provide the best chance of grabbing the undead celebs who would be in high demand the day after. Hosted by London-based Angels Fancy Dress, the séance was a curious paranormal promotional stunt that seemed to exist separately from the company, with mentions of the Tweance only to be found tucked away in long-archived tags and website plug-ins.

Speaking in 2009, a representative of Angel's Fancy Dress said that "we were amazed that no one had used Twitter for a séance before" and were keen to be first to experiment with the format.¹ In promotional interviews and articles of the time, the Tweance was presented as a fully



A final roster of River Phoenix, Kurt Cobain, Shakespeare and Michael Jackson



LEFT AND OPPOSITE: Kurt and Jacko turned up, but Shakespeare was a no-show. **BELOW:** Psychic Jayne Wallace.

entrepreneur, who has, no doubt, long removed the Tweance from her psychic CV. However, in 2009, her Selfridges-based 'Psychic Sisters' concession was in its infancy, and she was best known in the press for delivering messages of marital regret from the recently-deceased reality TV star Jade Goody.² Having 'spoken' to Jade, who died of cervical cancer aged just 27, Jayne was no stranger to celebrity séances and delivering pertinent messages from the beyond. She was apparently approached directly by Angels Fancy Dress, and we can only presume that she was physically present during the séance, as the text-based event was free from any images or footage of Jayne's involvement. This further exacerbated the strange disconnect between séance and sitter, but makes for fascinating post-mortem reading.

The Tweance was not a livestream, but a blow-by-blow thread of psychic chat and snappy messages from the other side. At times, the interactions with long-dead-greats read like failed coffee-shop dates live-tweeted across the world by a silent onlooker, while we all refresh, waiting for the next clumsy attempt at flirty profundity. This is not to say that the ghostly greats did not visit Angels Fancy Dress that evening, but they may have been having an 'off' night.

From all the Tweance's prompts and meagre public submissions, a final roster of River Phoenix, Kurt Cobain, William Shakespeare and Michael Jackson was chosen, with their attendance promised throughout the evening.

As the Tweance commenced, River Phoenix was on time and keen to answer questions and deliver anti-drug messages, referencing his own death from an overdose in 1993. According to

interactive experience, at least in theory. Public engagement was encouraged by opening the floor to other Twitter users, who would suggest the spiritual targets for the evening: they would tweet the Tweance account details of their chosen dead celebrity and one question, and Angels Fancy Dress would forward requests to their medium. Few took this call for submissions seriously, with suggestions ranging from (the very much alive) Paul McCartney to Adolf Hitler, Charlie Chaplin, "three of the Ramones", Elvis and Michael Jackson. Sadly, Paul McCartney and Hitler were otherwise engaged on the night of the 30th, but many others came through, aided by psychic medium Jayne Wallace.

Wallace is a long-established clairvoyant, businesswoman, and popular Dragon's Den



Jayne, during the Tweance, “He was very generous, but he didn’t understand love... He was fickle and easily bored, but lacked self confidence and control. Drugs put him outside of reality.” River was rather vague and bland in his tweeted responses, offering such glib inspirational statements as “Jump in the deep end, always fulfil dreams and ambitions. Do your job honestly and sincerely. And Rock.”

Among all the sincere apologies to his mother and friends was the hilariously unexpected question of “What did you think of *Interview with a [sic] Vampire?*” Despite its seemingly incongruity, the question referred to the fact that Phoenix died before he could play the role of Molloy in the film, which is dedicated to his memory. He was keen to give the 1994 movie his blessing, stating: “It was much better than it would have been with me in it.” If Phoenix truly was there in spirit, this was a charmingly modest and self-deprecating response; however, if your belief in mediumship is weak, then it could be seen as an insult to the late actor.

No sooner had River Phoenix faded away than Kurt Cobain emerged, following the predicted order of the evening. Cobain arrived by communicating a “fuzzy, spaced out feeling”, conveying “tears, shortness of breath. Bad pain inside the body... itchy skin and sore gums.” Wherever Kurt had been in the spirit world, it seemed to be a far cry from fluffy clouds, cherubs and harps. As with River Phoenix, Kurt’s messages from the great beyond were similarly anti-substance abuse, sharing how “drugs destroyed my passion for music”, interrupted only by his confirming that Dave Grohl was indeed ‘a good drummer’ and that he was nonplussed about his music being used on *Guitar Hero*. A fact that I’m sure is a huge relief to Nirvana fans.

Alas, for all of Jayne’s psychic prowess, she was not strong enough to summon



Angels Fancy Dress

@tweance

Angels Fancy Dress conduct the first-ever Twitter séance. Tweet who you want to be contacted and the question on 30 October to @tweance.

fancydress.com/tweance Joined September 2009

0 Following 1,317 Followers

Not followed by anyone you’re following

Posts

Replies

Media

Likes



Angels Fancy Dress @tweance · Oct 30, 2009

Goodbye from Jayne Wallace and all her Psychic Sisters. Have a happy weekend now we know MJ is at peace. xxx

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Angels Fancy Dress @tweance · Oct 30, 2009

Jayne: It was such a privilege and an honour to have such wonderful spiritual energy around us. Thank you all for your messages and support.

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Angels Fancy Dress @tweance · Oct 30, 2009

(Jayne: He wants to depart now. I can feel his spirit letting me go. He is light and will continue sending light and love around the world).

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the spirit of William Shakespeare, who never made it through the doors of the Tweance, being too “weak” to do so, possibly as a result of having been bothered by so many mediums over the centuries. Either that, or 16th century English was too wordy for Twitter’s 140-character limit...

Thankfully for everyone at home, there was a far stronger and more persistent spirit waiting in the wings. Michael Jackson positively skipped into the Tweance room, popping over from Paradise, thrilled to “finally connect with his fans”. Curiously, the Tweance happened a month before Sky 1’s infamous live ‘Michael Jackson Séance’, where the late King of Pop would profess similar joy at

connecting with his fans “for the first time”. Jackson had died aged 50 in June of 2009 and, like many celebrities, was being hassled in the afterlife almost before his body was cold.

Regardless of questions of taste, Michael was keen to convey how he had “found his spiritual fans” in the afterlife, periodically pausing to sing and dance in joyful celebration. Of course, this was for Jayne’s ears only.

One of the most pointed, and unpleasant, questions to make it through to the other side was “Who was responsible for your death?”, which felt rather like kicking a ghost while he was down, but also anticipating one hell of a tabloid headline. Thankfully, for us, if not Angels’ PR department, Michael appeared to hold no grudges and blamed himself for not asking for help sooner. Rather than dwelling on Earthly pains, he made sure to note his disappointment at not completing his UK tour, something that seemed to remain a major source of regret for him in

the afterlife.

Michael eventually left the Tweance, reassuring us that his “masks have all fallen off now. I am just myself and I feel pure, and I want people to know that.” It was a sentiment echoed by medium Jayne, who commented that his “spirit is lighter and purer and more innocent than most.” This seemed to be a pointed, and repetitive, sentiment; notably so, considering the controversial claims surrounding the musician and his activities on this side of the pearly gates.

As MJ left the Tweance room, the medium and the Twitter account were hot on his heels. With Jayne and her “psychic sisters” wishing us all a “happy weekend now we know MJ is at peace. xxx”, the Tweance drew to a close. Although I can’t guarantee that my own weekend was any merrier knowing that Michael Jackson was singing ‘Earth Song’ into eternity, we can only hope that others may have taken some small comfort from the Tweance’s revelations.

The Twitter Séance did not set the paranormal world on fire, and there have been no notable copycat efforts since MJ’s spiritual exit back in 2009, yet the format still seems to pose interesting possibilities. Indeed, the Twitter séance could be seen as a precursor to the ghost hunting applications now available, for a small fee, on mobile phones. Twitter is no more a séance room than your phone is a portal to the afterlife, but the immediacy of online communication, and the excitement of combining technology with the supernatural continues to enthrall and excite. However, I can’t say that I’ll be tuning in for the great TikTok exorcism of 2023...

NOTES

1 www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/chat-jacko-twitter-seance-18110600

2 www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/entertainment/news/a6662/jade-speaks-from-grave-92621/

◆ KATE CHERRELL is a writer and academic specialising in 19th century Spiritualism. She curates the blog BurialsandBeyond.com.



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Psychiatry and the supernatural

Science, faith and folklore intersect in the Victorian asylum, says **Jennifer Wallis**, asking at what point belief in the supernatural came to be interpreted as a sign of mental ill health

Troubled by Faith

Insanity and the Supernatural in the Age of the Asylum

Owen Davies

Oxford University Press 2023

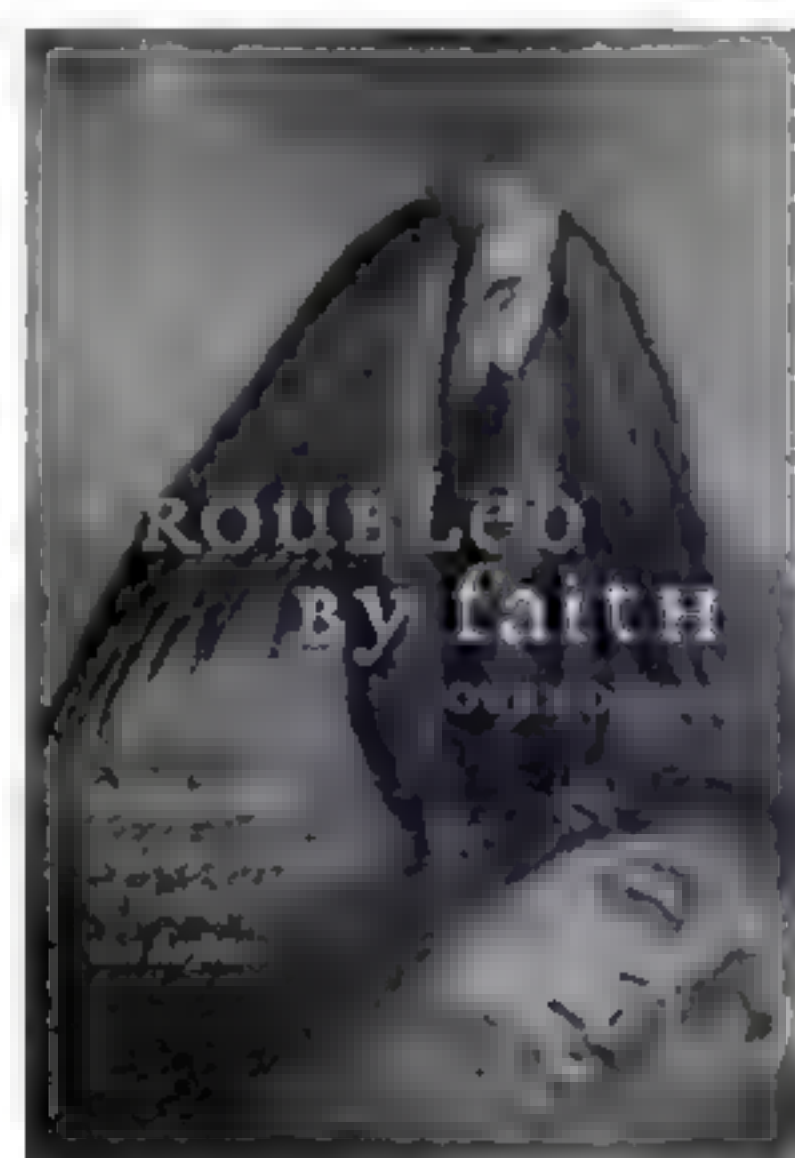
Hb, 368pp, £25, ISBN 9780198873006

The 19th century witnessed a mania for asylum-building, an endeavour that coincided with rapid technological advancement, new scientific theories and changing religious landscapes. It was an era when faith in scientific progress often co-existed with older beliefs in fairies and witches. For contemporary commentators as well as historians, this begs the question: at what point does belief in the supernatural come to be interpreted as a sign of mental ill health? As Spiritualism grew in popularity in the second half of the century, for example, some psychiatrists were keen to claim such phenomena as part of their widening professional remit: Lyttelton Forbes Winslow's 1877 book *Spiritualistic Madness* claimed that American asylums contained almost 10,000 cases of "Spiritualistic insanity". Such tensions between explanatory frameworks – psychiatry of the period was also frequently at odds with general medicine – are evident throughout *Troubled by Faith*.

A central contention of the book, though, is that the utterances, writings and ideas of asylum patients – and cases recorded by their doctors – offer an untapped resource for researchers of faith and folklore. Divided into two parts, Part I considers the relationships between magic, folklore, and psychiatry. Chapter 1, on early psychiatric interest in witchcraft, is particularly fascinating, charting how the developing psychiatric profession used witch trials as a retrospective

diagnostic exercise. Psychiatrists such as Jean-Étienne Esquirol were delving into demonological textbooks alongside clinical treatises, using their findings to expand contemporary diagnostic categories. Chapter 4, on supernatural beliefs as they appeared in court cases, is also worthy of particular mention, building on classic works such as Roger Smith's *Trial by Medicine* to offer a vivid – albeit often tragic – account of how belief in witches and spirits could motivate violent crime.

Part II focuses more squarely on the experiences of patients, gleaned from casebooks and



other asylum records across England and Scotland.

The bulk of the book is

made up of examples from these archives, and from the writings of contemporary medical men. It is an approach reminiscent of the early folklorists and, although it's an approach that may frustrate historians hoping for a more in-depth analysis of certain topics, it gives the book a lively readability. Occasionally, the reader may form the impression that psychiatry progressed in a linear fashion, with major papers heralding new frameworks of understanding – the "demolishing" of the link between the Moon and epilepsy after Jacques-Joseph Moreau's 1854 essay on the subject, for example. The reality was often more complicated, with folkloric beliefs co-existing alongside scientific theories well into the 20th century.

Folkloric beliefs co-existed alongside scientific theories well into the 20th century

A historiographical strength of the book, however, is Davies's pushback against stereotypical views of the asylum as simply a sinister, Foucauldian, backwater. Several recent histories of psychiatry have taken similar stances and it's refreshing to see patient-centred histories analysed in a way that doesn't assume passive victimhood. Of course, abuses took place, but asylums could also be "places of compassion and sensitivity". Many asylum doctors and chaplains advised against trying to argue with patients about religious delusions, for example, noting that this could often cause more harm than good.

Choosing not to cover the well-trodden ground of the asylum as an administrative, legalistic, oppressive space, Davies instead looks at it as "an extraordinary cultural space", a "place of enchantment" that can offer profound insights into the condition of wider society. Hallucinations have been little studied in histories of psychiatry, despite significant contemporary interest in them, so the rich details of those included in Part II are welcome. Although hallucinations could be the result of physical changes and sensations in some neurological conditions, and a symptom of more abstract psychological disturbance, Davies focuses here on the real-life influences that could also be at play (one could often "hear voices" through the paper-thin

walls of slum housing).

Patients' hallucinations are also investigated for what they reveal about local fairy lore, witchcraft beliefs and healing practices. Asylum records contain colloquial terms for witchcraft (being "imagined", "overlooked", or "betooked") and sometimes very evocative anecdotes that demonstrate how supernatural beliefs might be used by patients to explain their behaviour within an unfamiliar institutional environment. Dinah Nicholson, a patient at Crichton Hospital, attributed her brief disappearance from the asylum to being "fairy-led", having been bewitched by the fairies who encouraged her to follow them. By the early 20th century, such folk beliefs were beginning to be supplanted by concerns about new technologies like the telephone. Irish psychiatrist Conolly Norman was fascinated by the parallels between the belief in witchcraft and the conviction that one was being persecuted by modern technologies, evidenced in his 1905 article "Modern Witchcraft: A Study of a Phase of Paranoia".

In studying supernatural beliefs in and around the asylum, Davies notes some important context that is ripe for further study, such as the influence of evangelical preachers and mass literacy on mental health and illness, or the "pick and mix" attitude to religion that complicates many traditional histories of religious belief in Victorian Britain. Reading *Troubled by Faith* alongside histories that foreground the clinical theories guiding the interpretational work of asylum staff, this is an important addition to the history of psychiatry, but also to histories of folklore and religion in the 19th century.

★★★★

Dredd's future is today

Steve Toase sees how our present-day reality was foreseen in the 2000AD comic

I Am the Law

How Judge Dredd Predicted the Future

Michael Molcher

Rebellion Publishing 2023

Pb, 369pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781786185709

One of the main themes in the news over the past few years has been the role of the police, often relating to their criminality, abuse of authority, and whether we need a police force for certain community functions at all.

With *I Am the Law*, Michael Molcher uses the long running British comic strip *Judge Dredd* to contextualise the events around these discussions and argue that a lot of the issues of police transgression have been discussed, satirised and criticised within the panels of *2000AD*'s best known strip.

Judge Dredd first emerged from the imaginations of John Wagner and artist Carlos Ezquerro into the British cultural landscape at a time of Sweeney-style police brutality, riots and

the birth of the law and order rhetoric that came to define debates around policing.

Over the intervening 45 years, Mega-City One has seen many topics play out in its streets, such as police corruption, SWAT team raids, Broken Windows social controls, the policing of the body, and restrictions on protest.

While Judge Dredd stories are set in a world where block wars are commonplace and the

city is regularly invaded by Judge Death (who Molcher points out is not an opposite of Dredd but his logical conclusion), the topics the comic has covered are very real.

It's obvious that Molcher has a great affection for the comic (though he is scathing of people who see Dredd as a hero rather than satire), and his knowledge here is encyclopædic.

Where he excels is drawing lines between real world situations and those that have played out in the comic, for example the 2001 Dredd story, "The Runner", and the February 2020 case of Ahmaud Arbery.

He is also very effective at looking at the historical context of British policing, such as the use of British colonies as test beds for more extreme and brutal approaches to controlling the population.

Molcher has to walk a very fine line here; too academic and the

book becomes less accessible, too popularist and it loses the heft and weight of its arguments.

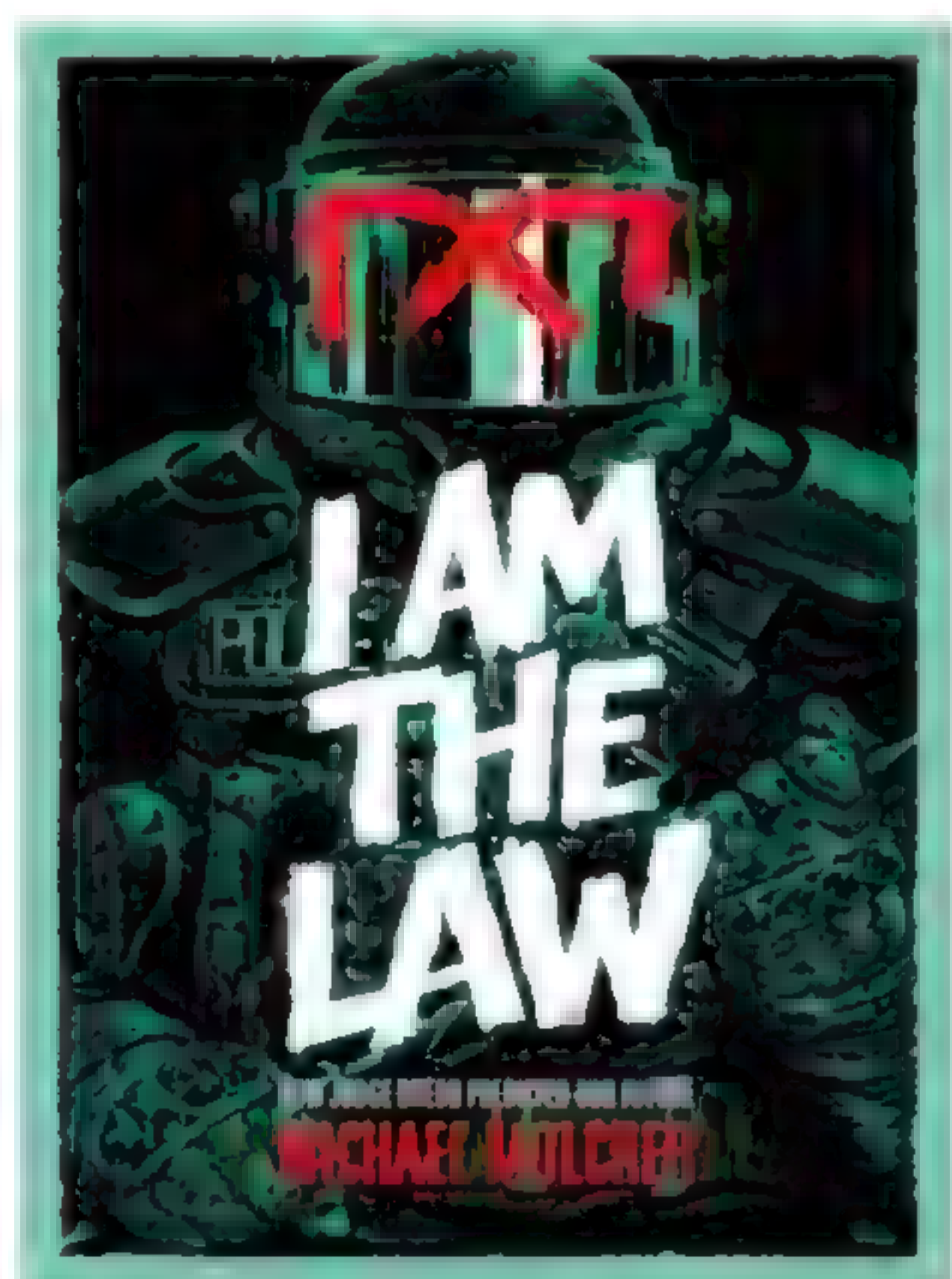
With *I Am the Law*, he has achieved a rare thing, and written a book that deals with a complex and often controversial subject in a nuanced and

highly readable way.

Throughout *I Am the Law* is extremely well referenced, both to allow the reader to dive deeper into the world of Judge Dredd, and to read around the subject of policing.

More than anything, Molcher shows us, to paraphrase the writer William Gibson, the dystopian future of Mega-City One is already here, it's just not evenly distributed.

★★★★★



Origins of the Gods

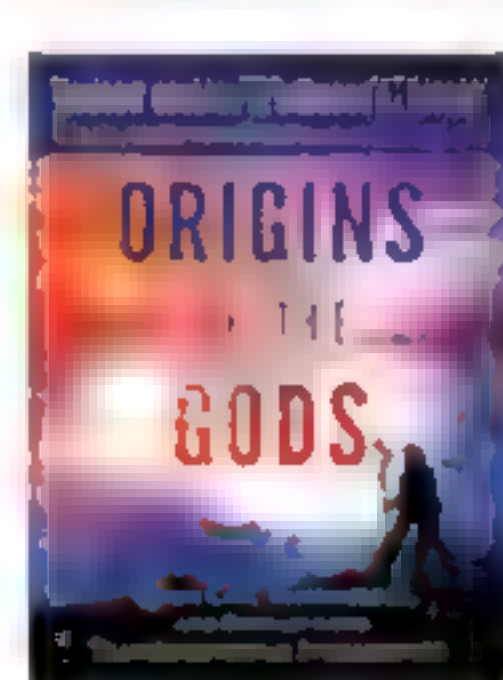
Qesem Cave, Skinwalkers and Contact with Transdimensional Intelligences

Andrew Collins & Gregory L Little

Bear & Co 2022

Pb, £17.99, 362pp, ISBN 9781591434092

Over several decades, the British cultural explorer Andrew Collins has carved his own niche in the genre of alternative histories of the human race and its origins in the deep past. He has advanced – or revived – several



different theories ranging from alien intervention to bizarre ancient races of humanoids that have come down to us as the giants and little people of myths and lore. In this volume he teams up with his American counterpart Gregory Little to recapitulate their overlapping research.

The authors focus upon the Denisovan Cave in the Altai Mountains of Siberia, the Qesem Cave in Israel, the Göbekli Tepe complex in Turkey and many North American native locations for their central thesis: that the earliest shamans and "prophets" chose certain places because the location (in an unknown way) resonated with or amplified the psychical abilities of the people who settled around such places.

Over time, the earliest communities formed and flourished and these so-called "sacred sites" shaped the local rituals, which in turn inspired mysterious artefacts, architectural structures and artworks. Although this is a thesis that has been explored in greater detail by others – such as Paul Devereux and his team who discovered the weird acoustic properties of some locations – Collins and Little set out a competent and well-written summary, full of interesting asides.

Unfortunately, they soon forsake the dull solidity of science in favour of the attractive SF tropes of the *Stargate*, *Alien* and *Ancient Aliens* franchises. Those ancient shamans – who were quite probably the result of alien genetic engineering, they say – had developed a technology, powered by local rocks and

collective worship, for building "transdimensional portals that are still active". Unfortunately, these portals – which once communicated with "higher dimensional beings" without any paraphernalia or principles recognisable to modern science and engineering – now no longer function as described.

Undaunted, the authors continue to embellish their vision with selected stories of biblical, paranormal and occult phenomena, sprinkled with references to quantum entanglement.

Today, humankind has become "disconnected from nature and a fully visible night sky"; but, the authors conclude, "If we can restore our spiritual connections, perhaps we can once again communicate with those higher dimensional beings". As other SF tropes kick in, one can only wonder whether that would be a wise thing to do. The prodigal sons of this Earth may not be welcome.

Bob Rickard

★★

West

Tales of the Lost Lands

Martin Wall

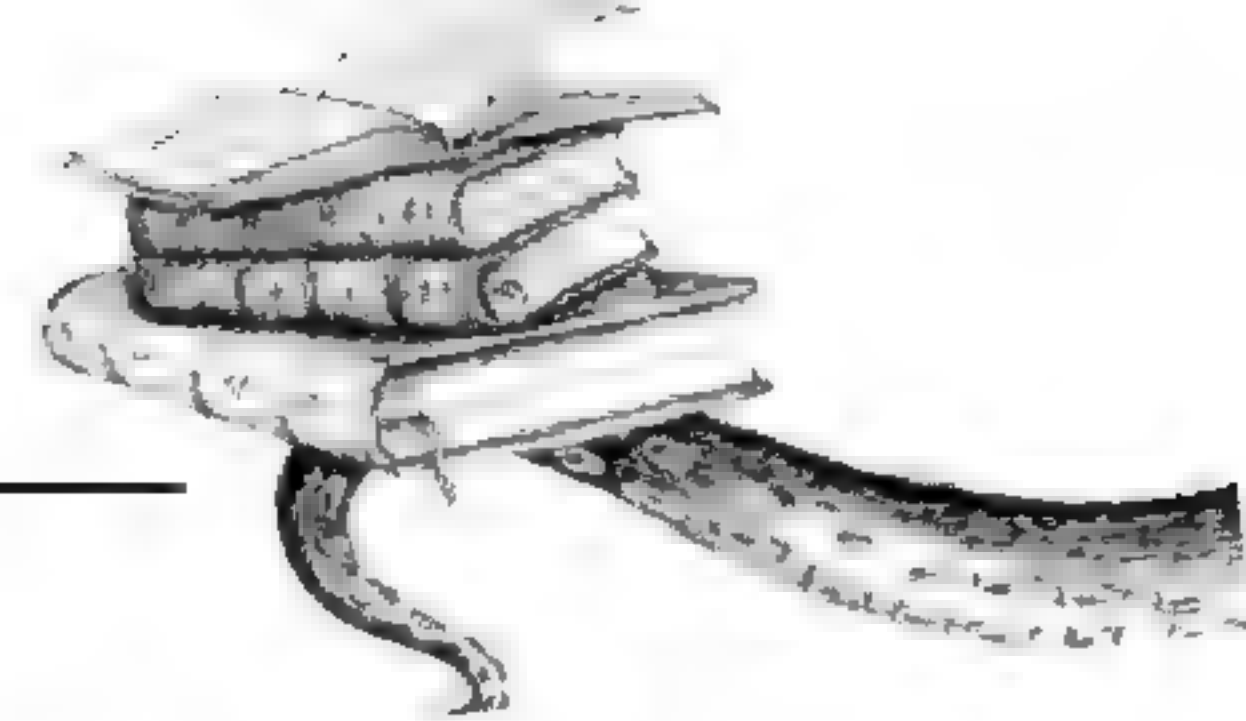
Amberley 2023

Hb, 287pp, £20, ISBN 9781398110199

This is an edgy book, about edge places, by an edge person. All the best books are. You only get a proper view of anywhere from the edge.

Wall's a wanderer and a vagabond. He's seen the West Midlands (the Lost Lands of the west in this book) from many edges: the edge of respectability, the edges of ordinary perception and the edge of the country itself. Now he's looking back at the land from the edge of his life: "I have the feeling of being a pupa," he writes. Soon he'll explode out of it, spread his wings, and head west to the country over the blue hills of Shropshire and Worcestershire. But in the meantime he's got work to do.

He sits outside the cave of the great bard, Layamon, author of the epic poem *Brut – A Chronicle of Britain*, who was seen by Tolkien as the English equivalent of Snorri Sturluson. And there he senses a commission: "I began to feel that the responsibility to continue the great labour of the ages, the



sacred record of 'The Matter of Britain', had somehow, in some vanishingly small way, fallen on me."

That sort of messianism doesn't usually bode well for readability. It's often a recipe for stodginess or pomposity or self-aggrandisement or nationalistic



poison. Not here. There's lots about Wall himself, but that's because he loves his places and passion can't be rendered

dispassionately. There's no gratuitous self-referential sentimentalism. He's excellent company. Wall's West Midlands were never exorcised when Christianity arrived. The Wild Hunt, led by Edric the Forester dressed in the fairy colours of green and white, rides along the motorway verge, visible only at the edge of sight. The healing springs still heal. If your car breaks down at night you might be followed by a hanged man with a stretched neck. Courting couples, cavorting in the rhododendrons, are likely to be disturbed by gigantic furry beings peering in. Banshees scream. The land's literally enchanted: sustained by druidic songs which if your ear's right you might hear trickling out of a hill. Ley lines matter much more than the A5.

There's urgency here too, and lament and fear, for the country's being trashed. Tolkien was another West Midlander, and his beloved Shire is what the West Midlands should be – bar the Black Riders. But, as Wall reminds us: "the Dark Riders are gathering ... Who will be the Ring-bearer now?" Wall does his bit, and does it splendidly.

Charles Foster
★★★★

Mary Magdalene

A Visual History

Diane Apostolos-Cappadona

T&T Clark 2023

Hb, 176pp, £17.99, ISBN 978-0567705747

She is a biblical enigma and from a handful of mentions in the Gospels a multitude of pious legends have been created. But who was Mary Magdalene? She was the demonically possessed Galilean woman from whom seven demons were cast; the

reformed harlot forgiven by Christ; the devotee who anointed Jesus's feet with precious ointment; one of the women who stood weeping at the foot of the cross; and the Mary who was the first person to meet the risen Christ. Many roles, but very little detail and artists over the centuries have permitted themselves to speculate.

The Virgin Mary is traditionally depicted in blue; Mary Magdalene's colour is a vivid red, but this is one of the few recurring themes in Magdalene art. Artists have generally represented her according to their own circumstances and imagination. Some painting her have used the opportunity lustfully to explore the naked female form. Yet, she has also more recently become a feminist



icon and women artists have depicted her accordingly. She is, writes Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "the most flexible female figure in Christian Art" – as she is in Christian legend.

After the Resurrection, it is said, she travelled afar with the Christian message. One story tells of Mary travelling to southern France and her last days were, according to which legend you prefer, spent in India, with the Risen Christ in a desert or in Ephesus with the Virgin Mary and St John. Some say she was transported by angels.

Her many relics can also be seen today preserved in precious reliquaries like the one now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York made to display one of the saint's teeth.

The book, which has references to many art forms including film, fiction and opera, contains over 60 high-quality reproductions of paintings and art works. The cover shows an elaborate 15th-century altarpiece. Inside, works range from the a pre-Raphaelite-style portrait by Frederick Sandys of a flame-haired figure clutching a jar of precious ointment, to several mediæval pieta and a striking modern painting by Janet McKenzie.

It is a book for readers interested in art history and for those fascinated by holy myths and religious legends. Mary Magdalene is an elusive figure onto which

many portrayals of femininity have been, and can be, projected.

Ted Harrison
★★★★

Aleister Crowley in Paris

Sex, Art and Magick in the City of Light History

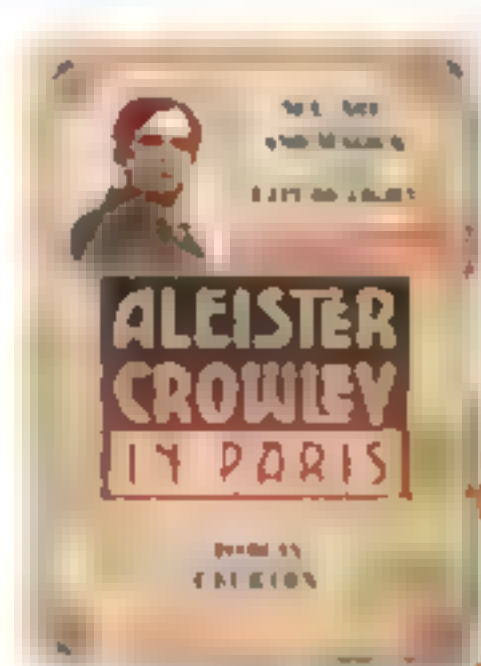
Tobias Churton

Inner Traditions 2023

Hb, 368pp, £26, ISBN 9781644114797

"Crowley was at heart pure Decadent", writes Tobias Churton, so it is fitting he felt at home in Paris: city of absinthe and Baudelaire, cultural epicentre of the *fin-de-siecle*, and not least a key site in the 19th-century occult revival that gave rise to Britain's Order of the Golden Dawn.

This is the final volume in Churton's monumental series of Crowley books, which have covered his time in India, America, Berlin and elsewhere. Crowley sites in Paris include 55 Avenue Souffren, where he lived, and the Dome café in Montparnasse. But the emphasis is largely on the people Crowley knew during the several Paris periods of his life, including a period in Montparnasse around 1902, when he was acquainted with Somerset Maugham, inspiring his novel *The Magician*, and



a more extended stay during the 1920s, struggling with heroin addiction and having trouble with the authorities.

Churton writes in an unbuttoned, airily confident style, and tends to take Crowley at his own estimation. In the US during World War I, he notoriously wrote pro-German propaganda, but we are told his autobiography "indicates" his real motive was securing American bank loans for Britain to pursue the war – a better word here might be "claims".

Aleister Crowley in Paris is rich in minutiae and undigested research material, and despite Churton's manifest intelligence the result can be a bit of a dog's dinner; it doesn't have the excitable howlers of the England volume, but the almost excessive background on minor characters and the unfocused, unselective quotation of letters and newspaper articles can be jading to read.

Happily there is still plenty of interest, including Crowley's 1908 Paris "magical retreat"; his friendship and extensive correspondence with his artist brother-in-law Gerald Kelly, and his relationships with Eileen Gray, the renowned modernist furniture designer, and more fleetingly with celebrated photographer Berenice Abbott, with whom Crowley characteristically records an act "*in manu dominæ*" (in the hand of the mistress) more commonly known in English as a handjob.

Phil Baker
★★★★

Runaway Science

True Stories of Raging Robots and Hi-Tech Horrors

Nick Redfern

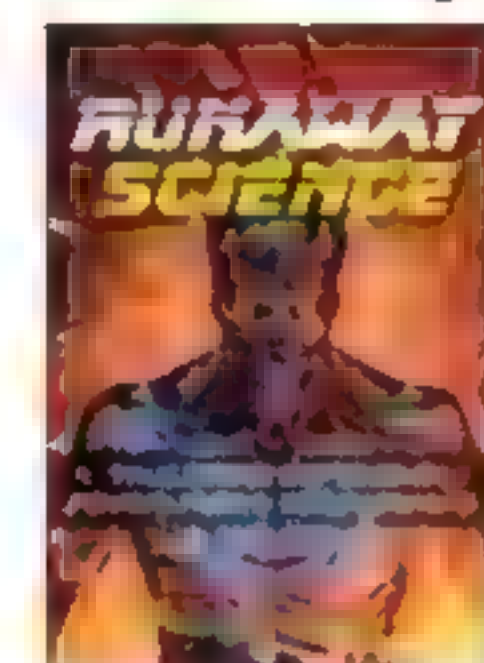
Visible Ink Press 2023

Pb, 300pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781578598014

This is not exactly a book, more a book-length assemblage of short clippings from the Internet loosely assembled into chapters without any sign of deeper consideration.

The brief was clearly to share scary stories about robots; of the 36 short chapter titles 19 specifically mention robots, while others cover related topics like bionics and cyborgs. It looks as though someone has googled a topic, then cut-and-pasted from the top hits. Each chapter intersperses multi-paragraph-length quotes from Internet articles with brief comments by the author, but there is no train of thought or analysis. The material is generally superficial and uneven.

I'm familiar with many of these topics and this book glances off the surface of all of them, deflected by sensationalist cover-



age and with no interest in going deeper. None of the chapters would make it across the quality threshold for inclusion as features in FT. Purely apart from the lack of ideas, there simply is not enough original writing. This is tabloid level journalism, and a real disappointment from an author who has produced far more worthwhile work in the past.

David Hambling
★

In Goth we trust

Ross MacFarlane believes this rich exploration of a musical culture is the book Cathi Unsworth was always meant to write

Season of the Witch

The Book of Goth

Cathi Unsworth

Nine Eight Books 2023

Hb, 488pp, £22, ISBN 9781788706247

The term “Haunted Generation” – coined by Bob Fischer in a 2017 *Fortean Times* article of the same name – has become an increasingly popular label for those born in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. They have come to be seen as a distinctive cultural cohort, shaped by the weird schooling of the occult-inflected television of the period. But what cultural products did these teenagers move onto next? It’s a fair assumption that by the 1980s, a sizeable number of the Generation broadened their taste through the burgeoning alternative music scene of the time. And a fair few did the same as Cathi Unsworth – future music journalist, crime novelist and regular FT contributor – and become a Goth.

Season of the Witch is Unsworth’s account of the peak Goth music years and the cultural influences surrounding its development. Given the author sees this being from the late 1970s to 1990, it’s no surprise that she sees Margaret Thatcher’s prime ministership as a malign influence. Unsworth saw Thatcher, ruling with an ever-increasing authoritarian streak, creating a country beset by political strife and economic chaos.

As such, this is no ordinary “I-was-there” music memoir. Understandably, Unsworth draws upon her clear love and detailed knowledge of the music, but the book is built upon a considerable amount of research, enabling her to build up a narrative rooted in the social and cultural life of 1980s Britain. Such a structure allows her both to zoom in to detailed accounts of the rise and fall of different bands and to pull out to the broader social and cultural landscapes in which

they were operating. It results in both a clearly written summary of an underappreciated musical genre, and a cultural history with an occult tinge.

For Unsworth, hidden influences can be seen in different aspects of culture. Some were explicit, with several bands taking a direct interest in the mystical and ritualistic: Jaz Coleman of Killing Joke had a thorough understanding of Aleister Crowley’s Thelemic teachings; Ian Astbury of the (Southern Death) Cult took inspiration from an immersion in the mythologies and rites of North American indigenous peoples. Other influences were more suggestive, with Unsworth’s reconstruction of the 1980s throwing up uncanny coincidences which border on the darkly conspiratorial: Pope John Paul II begins his visit to the UK



the day before the British Army fights the pivotal battle of the Falklands War, and leaves weeks before Vatican-linked banker Roberto Calvi is found hanging from the underside of Blackfriars Bridge, a case which has never been solved.

At a broader psychological level, her 1980s Britain is also one scarred by contemporary armed conflict – whether in Northern Ireland or the Falklands – and psychically damaged by the ever-present fear of imminent nuclear apocalypse. It’s a country where the alleged corruption of the police and increasing connivance with the Government (most noticeably in the brutal handling of the Min-

ers’ Strike of 1984-5), or in the blatant misogyny and homophobia of the period, created a toxic atmosphere which Unsworth believes Goth culture helped to oppose and challenge. Described as such, how could bands of an anti-Establishment bent not create music as darkly hued as the society around them?

Unsworth’s definition of Goth music appears coloured by her personal taste. Eyebrows may be raised by the inclusion of bands such as The Cramps or artists such as Marc Almond or Danielle Dax – or indeed, the exclusion of the more industrial Throbbing Gristle, Psychic TV or Coil (particularly given the more direct immersion in the occult of those bands). To be fair, she acknowledges the latter as consisting of a “Goth alternative universe”, and cites the detailed account of their activities in David Keenan’s *England’s Hidden Reverse* (2003).

Unsworth’s personal curation extends to bookending chapters with pen portraits of influential “Goth Fathers” and “Goth Mothers” (influences on her 1980s musicians of everyone from Edgar Allan Poe to Maria Callas) and finishing with a lengthy appendix of books and films infused with Goth vibes. Even though *Season of the Witch* focuses on the 1980s, this additional detail allows her to argue for Goth as a more capacious and influential cultural form than is often accepted.

Season of the Witch is not only a rich sourcebook of darkly cultural thrills, but clearly a labour of love for the author. Bringing together the interests and formative influences that have inspired her previous work, it’s the book Cathi Unsworth was always meant to write. For those wishing to get a sense of what the Haunted Generation did next – or even to relive their 1980s Goth period – in the words of one of the most influential of the bands featured in the book: “this is the way / step inside”.

★★★★

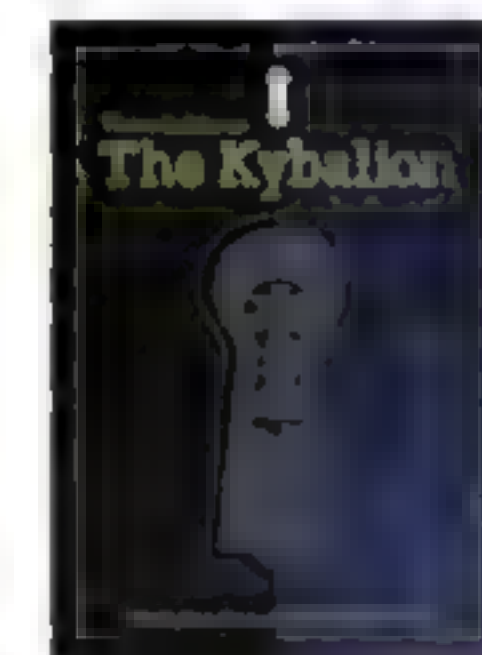
The Kybalion

ed. Lucas Fernando Sosa & Alberto O Asla

O Books 2022

Pb, 224pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781785359835

This is a reprint of 1908’s *The Kybalion: A Study of the Hermetic Philosophy of Ancient Egypt and Greece*, by “the Three Initiates”, probably one of William Walker Atkinson’s pseudonyms. A significant proponent of the New Thought movement, Atkinson was a highly prolific author, publishing over 100 books



and pamphlets between 1900 and 1920. Using his own name, or Yogi Ramacharaka, Theron Q Dumont, Magus Incognito

and several others, his works promised to teach seekers how to train their memory, hypnotise others, read minds, foretell the future and become more effective salesmen. New Thought’s success owed much to its combination of supposedly ancient wisdom, self-improvement and the promise of financial success.

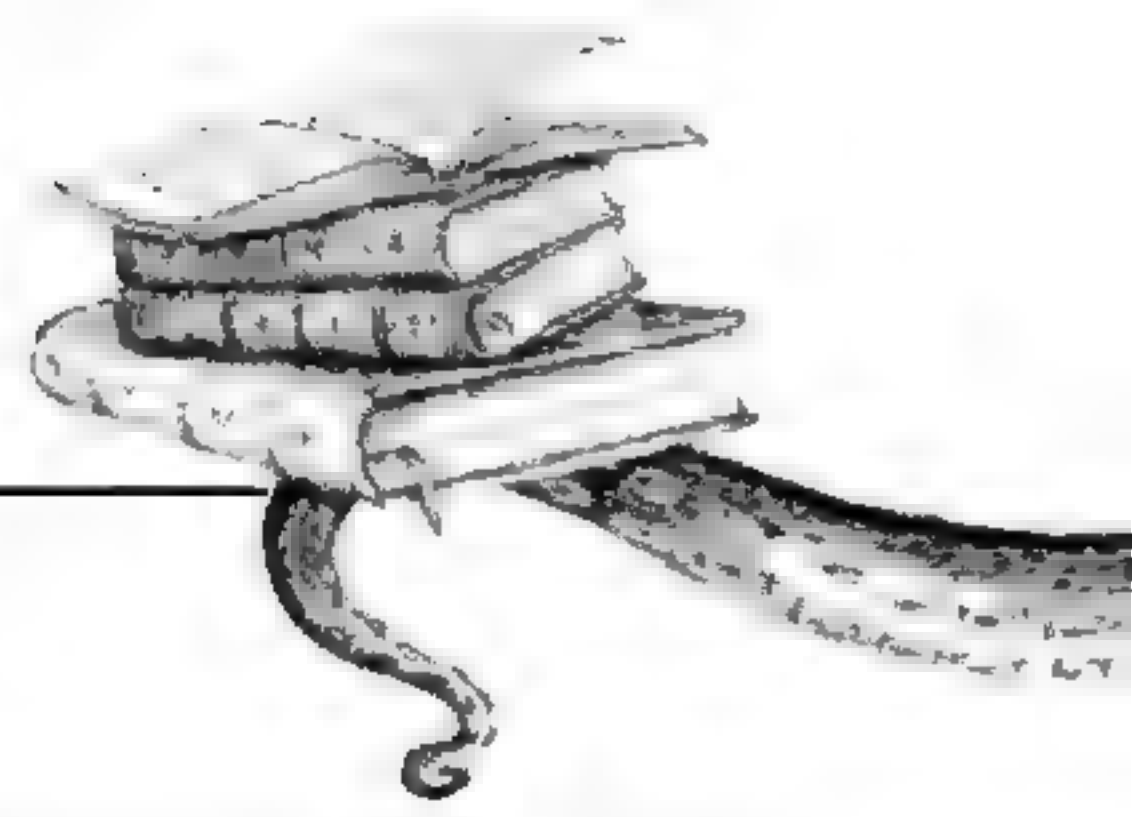
The Kybalion purports to be a lost fragment of ancient Hermetic teachings originating in ancient Egypt via the great Hermes Trismegistus (himself a fiction, a conflation of the gods Thoth and Hermes). Containing “the basic principles of Mental Transmutation” we may “possess the Master-Key that will unlock the many doors of the Principle of Polarity”.

Long out-of-copyright, numerous editions of *The Kybalion* are currently available. This particular version begins with the editors’ “Presentation”, offering us a “synthesis of airtight knowledge based on ancient Egyptian precepts and certain passages from the Book of Proverbs”. Several black & white line drawings depicting swords, crystals and geometric shapes are also present. Although uncaptioned, they presumably serve as visual depictions of ancient wisdom, the “perennial philosophy”.

As an example of Atkinson’s prodigious New Thought output, this book has some historical value. But as an aide to mystical enlightenment or self-help, the judicious reader would fare better with the *Corpus Hermetica*, or *How to Win Friends and Influence People*.

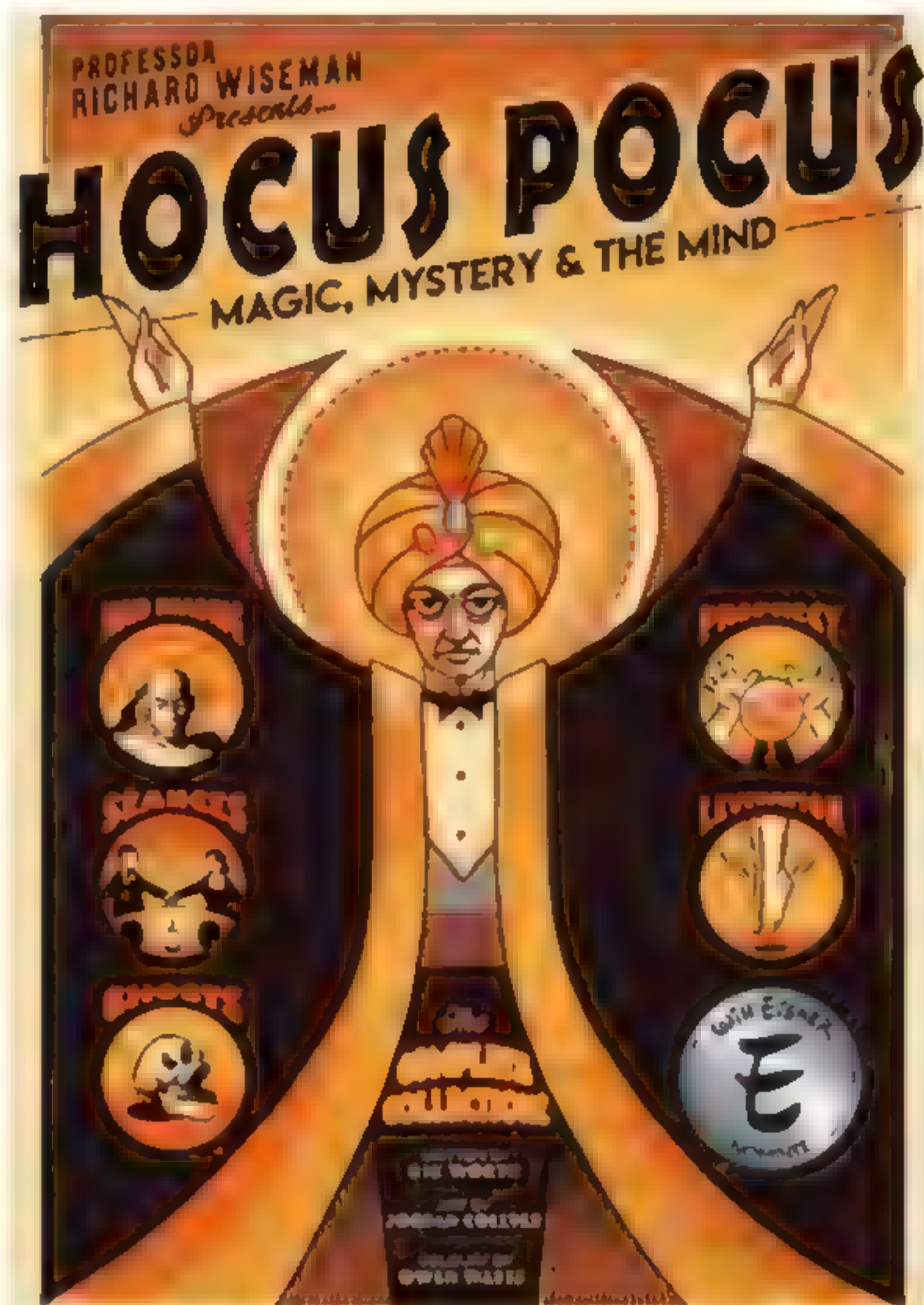
Christopher Josiffe

★★



COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

STEVE TOASE PRESENTS HIS LATEST PICKS FROM THE WORLD OF SEQUENTIAL ART



Hocus Pocus: Magic Mystery and Mind The Complete Collection!

Rik Worth, Jordan Collver
Vanishing Inc 2023

Hb, 179pp, £30, ISBN 9781954243163

A while ago the first edition of *Hocus Pocus* landed in my letterbox, and was an excellent, funny and well written exploration of mind-reading. Now Rik Worth, Jordan Collver and Oliver Watts (with Richard Wiseman as creative consultant) have collected all five issues into a single volume. As well as the aforementioned mind reading, they also explore séances, ghosts, prophecy and levitation. With each subject they look at the main personalities involved, the techniques used and explanations for how the phenomena might be caused (such as infrasound). You will encounter Mother Shipton, Borley Rectory, and many other cases from history, including a cameo from everyone's favourite talking mongoose. The artwork is excellent throughout, as is the humour, with the colourwork by Watts giving each section its own character. What raises this above most comics about strange phenomena is the presence throughout of exercises to demonstrate the effects discussed in the stories. A very fortean comic that manages to never lose its sense of humour.

The Berg

Sarah Peploe, Frasier Campbell, Gavin Mitchell
www.kickstarter.com/projects/frasier-campbell/the-berg-1

48pp, £10

As we're often told, occult means hidden. If that's the case, there is nothing more occult than the sewers beneath our feet. Over the years the sewage system has been the subject of much forteana, and *The Berg* takes one of the weirder aspects of that lore, the fatberg, and makes it even stranger. A group of sanitation workers go

underground to sort out a blockage, and when they do things go (further) south very quickly, with time slips, hallucinations, and communication breakdowns. The strange happens in the margins, and in cities the sewers are right on the edge of the known world. Peploe and Campbell's writing is excellent, with very good characterisation, creating inter-relationships fast and cranking up the weird, something that is helped in no small part by the art of Gavin Mitchell and colouring of JP Jordan. 48 pages of strangeness that might encourage you to be a little more circumspect about what you flush away in future.

Explosive Sweet Freezer Razors

Gareth A Hopkins
<https://grthink.bigcartel.com/product/explosive-sweet-freezer-razors>

Pb, 244pp, £15

Explosive Sweet Freezer Razors is one of the stranger comics to cross my desk. Surreal and often unsettling text shows us the ghosts that are around us and the visceral rituals of witches. There is often a cut-up poetry feel to the text, but also a sense of structure and meaning that carries you forward. What seems at first to be the description of a day unravels around the edges to suggest something else scrap-

ing its way in. I'm not sure that Hopkins would describe this book as cosmic horror, but that sense of something outside pressing in often lies at the heart of the best examples of the genre. The artwork swirls with toppling columns, glimpsed faces, found materials, and geometric shapes, not quite forming coherence until you look closely, and then sometimes what you see is more disquieting than the text. *Explosive Sweet Freezer Razors* is evocative, experimental and unnerving, getting under your skin as you read, and if you enjoy strange tales of disturbing rituals, what's really under the sea, and a man's strange relationship with car parks (no, nothing like that), then this may be for you.

The Witches of World War II

Paul Cornell, Valeria Burzo
TKO Studios 2023

Pb, 160pp, £17.99, ISBN 9781952203183

At first, witchcraft and espionage may not seem to have a lot in common. However, both trade in secret knowledge, and because of that secrecy complex mythologies grow up around them, particularly around individuals involved in their practice. *The Witches of World War II* occupies that fascinating, and fortean, space. The character at the heart of the story is Doreen Dominy (later to become Doreen Valiente), a worker at Bletchley Park, the centre of Allied codebreaking during WWII. Recruited to lead a group of occultists to undermine the Axis powers, Dominy is beset by doubts and challenged by the strong personalities of the other members, which include Gerald Gardner, Dion Fortune, Rollo Ahmed, and, of course, Crowley.

Some incidents featured here have become part of the rich story of witchcraft in the United Kingdom, such as the New Forest Coven's attempt to raise a cone of power to protect the British Isles. There are also incidents from the war where the vagueness of the official version, like

the reason for Rudolf Hess travelling to Scotland, makes them fertile ground for storytelling. Paul Cornell is incredibly skilled at weaving together fact and fiction to tell a fascinating story. He also manages to capture the historical personalities featured, particularly the occultists, who all had strong characters shaped as much by the stories that grew up around them as by who they really were. Valeria Burzo's artwork is also excellent at capturing these larger-than-life personalities. I was also pleased to see an afterword by Professor Ronald Hutton, which goes into more detail about the events mentioned in the book. A highly recommended comic about two groups with many secrets.

Brigantia, Vol. 1

Chris Mole, Melissa Trender, Harriet Moulton

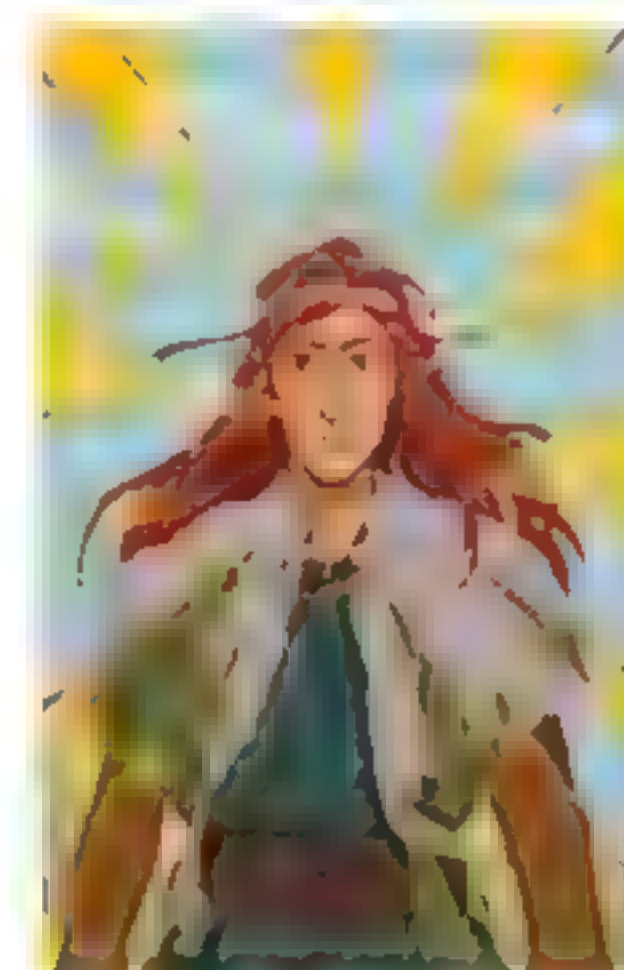
<https://chmsmole.bigcartel.com/product/brigantia-vol-1>

Pb, 132pp, £14

Beneath the hills of what will become Yorkshire, the goddess Brigantia faces Veteris the Snake Bitten and finds herself tricked into the contemporary world. With few believers left, few people who even remember her, Brigantia is not in a place where she can draw on her usual strength. This could so easily have just become a fish out of water/goddess out of time story; but at the heart of

Brigantia are questions about sovereignty and what such a complex term actually means. There are themes of fear versus strength, inclusivity of communities, and the nature of belief. There are also some very fortean elements such as phantom dogs.

Melissa Trender and Harriet Moulton's artwork is excellent, often breaking out of the confines of the panels to give a dynamic sense to the story. The lettering by Nikki Foxrobot, Aditya Bidikar, and Hassan Otsmane-Elhau adds an extra dimension. This is an excellent comic that uses the myths of the British Isles to tell new stories and explore important contemporary questions.



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Werewolves of Yorkshire

Paul Sinclair's new documentary eschews over-egged dramatisations and instead puts its witnesses front and centre, allowing them to share their weird and sometimes traumatic stories



Wolf Lands

Dir Paul Sinclair, UK 2023
Streaming on Amazon Prime

Most folklorists work hard, but Paul Sinclair's output is positively Stakhanovite. A full-on, boots-on-the-ground investigator, his multiple Truth-Proof volumes contain a wealth of contemporary lore from his corner of North East England set against a solid canon of traditional legends from the area, as he looks for recurring strands and associations. Sinclair gets out there and talks to people, and from some of those conversations comes his much-anticipated documentary, *Wolf Lands*.

The investigation begins in Flixton, North Yorkshire, when one night in 2015 a young woman was driving home with her partner and children after a day out. As they approached a junction on the road near Harper's Chip Shop, she saw what she can only describe as a werewolf sitting on the turfed island. They drove back to get another look, but it had gone.

Sam recounts a childhood encounter with a huge, hairy biped

What in print sounds like a somewhat unconvincing report is rendered far more credible by being narrated first hand, by the (albeit unseen and anonymous) witness – and this is one of the film's great strengths: all of the accounts are related by those who experienced them. While this is a relatively common device in a number of paranormally-themed television programmes, there is a huge variation in how they are handled; there's the near-hysterical style of some, complete with nerve-grating music, versus the braggadocio of others, and neither style actually enhances the narrative. Sinclair refreshingly eschews these approaches, instead reviewing the incidents in conversation with the witnesses on location, context being vital to fortean

investigation.

Sinclair tells us that there have been long-standing tales of huge, often bipedal wolf-like creatures as well as abrupt sensations of silent, nameless terror over a wide area; he speaks with local occultist Alistair Lavers and they discuss how archaeology suggests ancient beliefs regarding shamans and shapeshifters – shots of cave etchings with wolves and people wearing antler head-dresses – as well as the many local place names having lupine connotations. The whole area, for centuries it seems, has had lots of supernatural and/or wolfy stuff happening, and many of the reports have distinct correlations with each other, which Sinclair diligently sets out.

He heads up the coast to Scalby Mills and meets Gaz Gray, who had a clifftop encounter with an unseen something while doing some star gazing (the whole area is good for dark skies having relatively little light pollution – this of course also makes seeing things at night somewhat less easy). Gray was setting up his tripod when he felt an “eerie

silence, then overwhelming fear” for 10 to 15 seconds, with the impression of heavy footfalls. Gray is clearly a level-headed, straightforward chap, who says he has never felt a similar sensation before or since. Something similar happened to a mountain biker called Chris, riding downhill on a forest path and becoming aware of something moving very swiftly and remaining parallel to him behind the treeline. A lot of these experiences have similar motifs to Bigfoot and Dogman encounters Stateside; though doubtless perfectly aware of this, Sinclair sensibly keeps everything local. Chris's friend Sam recounts a childhood encounter with a huge, hairy biped in the woods while he was playing with friends: unbeknownst to either, a village a few miles to the east had tales of a “huge, hairy hound” terrifying those that strayed into the valley over a century ago. Again, Sinclair sits with Sam in the spot where his encounter happened, and Sam goes on to explain the impact it has had in the years since: this is another unusual facet of *Wolf Lands* – its examination of the lasting effects such frightening encounters have; and it's testament to Sinclair's passion that so many witnesses are persuaded to revisit what are quite traumatic memories.

The second half of the film focuses on two more detailed encounters: those of Jeff, a former Marine turned gamekeeper who had a deeply unsettling encounter while sleeping in an abandoned farmhouse, and the experience of Steve and Jimmy (along with a third party who declined to be interviewed) in a valley forest. These two stories are intercut, while Sinclair and his friend Lee Hayward talk about the big, orb-like lights they encountered near Flamborough Head, and two unnamed former squaddies describe a huge, upright, wolflike figure encountered in a nature



TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortaean offerings



The BBC's periodic interest in the weird seems to have been rekindled of late – from Danny Robins's excellent *Uncanny* podcast series to the borderline-unhinged *Wolf*. However, quietly in the midst of all this, a small breakout has been gaining traction. In *Paranormal: The Girl, The Ghost and the Gravestone*, the events of 20 years ago in a remote Welsh farmhouse once billed as Britain's most haunted are investigated by Radio 1 DJ Sian Eleri. She's a local girl by birth and goes in highly sceptical, certain she'll be exposing exaggerations and untruths woven into a local legend. We see her leaving the London hurly-burly for the unlit roads of rural Wales – there are a lot of shots of Sian going somewhere – and her homeland in Flintshire,

close to the centre of the events of a quarter-century ago.

Many of us will remember the story of the Gower family of Penyffordd Farm in Treuddyn, which in the late 1990s gained a great deal of attention, with hundreds of individual incidents recorded – figures glimpsed, disembodied voices, etchings on walls – and multiple witnesses (FT113:26, 122:50, 128:53, 151:54). It gathered momentum as the story seeped into the media, culminating in discussions on the likes of *Kilroy*. The case was investigated extensively,

They lived in an old farmhouse with a tombstone by the front door

not least by psychologist Dr Daniels with whom Eleri goes to speak first. They sit down in front of a VHS (lights off, static on the screen, slightly evoking *Poltergeist* – there's a whole lot of evocation going on throughout) as Daniels runs through the family set-up. The Gowers were resolutely respectable, living a normal life at an old farmhouse with a tombstone by the front door, which Eleri quickly spots as somewhat out of the ordinary: she later remarks that Penyffordd means “end of the road” and notes other unsettling elements. A blizzard of multicoloured Post-It notes festooned the fireplace to highlight peculiar marks and carvings, crosses in particular, and words, some in inaccessible places. It was decidedly rum all round. Sian borrows the doctor's archive material, gets herself a cork-board and starts unpicking, her bilingualism helping as all the words that appeared were in Welsh, and all had a religious connotation;

the Gowers, though, were English and non-Welsh speaking. She speaks with neighbours, who are refreshingly open and talkative and who describe various odd happenings, such as a Marian vision in a local field that sparked a mini-pilgrimage, before Eleri turns her attention to the accounts of the Gowers themselves.

Tales seem to get taller as they age: working out how much is shadow and how much what's casting it often becomes a reflective exercise, and in this case it's as much a process of discovery for Eleri about her own attitudes and unconsciously held beliefs as it is about untangling local mythology. As her investigation progresses we can see her reconnecting with her roots, discovering that anyone's own sense of place is about far more than just geography and, pertinently for those of us who look at cases such as this, how vital an holistic approach will always be.

reserve. Again, most of this emerges in conversations with Sinclair: there are a couple of re-enactments, but very brief and figurative with good use of masks (there's none of the weirdly unconvincing CGI often seen in this kind of film), in keeping with the shamanic theme. In addition, the music blends harmoniously with both narrative and photography, a pleasing, æthereal combination of Kate Bush and Clannad that illustrates and illuminates the story nicely without undue distraction.

There are also tales of animal and human mutilations, both in legend and in recent rumour, dark mentions of the area's proximity to RAF Fylingdales early-warning station and undertakers signing the Official Secrets Act and D

notices; but, again, Sinclair is quick to contextualise these tales, justifying their inclusion purely on the basis that the themes are a lot older than radar secrecy. We end with the conclusions of Steve and Jimmy and Jeff's respective stories, which whatever their nature clearly had a major affect on all concerned, and then a closing verse, read sympathetically by Sinclair himself.

The film overall has no agenda other than to raise awareness and point out that these stories are centuries, perhaps even millennia old: Sinclair doesn't try to shoehorn in any pet theories: his interest lies in the fact that these appear to be sincere witnesses who experienced something weird that people have been experiencing from prehistory.

Taken out of context, some of the encounters – the boy hiding in the woods, the werewolf on the roundabout – could be seen as funny, but *Wolf Lands* stares you down: it is a remarkable work, having a humility, honesty and above all integrity that is often lacking in this field. Highly recommended. Stu Neville

★★★★★

Rage

Dir Jaco Bouwer, SA, 2023
Available on digital platforms

A group of school-leavers become the targets of a pagan cult in Jaco Bouwer's uneven chiller. Arriving at one of their parents' beach houses where culty goings on have been reported, the friends are haunted by ghostly presences

and bothered by bizarre locals. There are some nice touches, and the South African locales are very pretty, but ultimately this is all treading very familiar ground. *Kill List*-y cultists stalk about doing strange things, any attempt to escape is doomed to failure and everybody will guess who the last friend standing will be within the first three minutes.

Rage also seems about 20 years out of date, with its sadistic, torture porn-ish elements feeling almost quaint. The cast are game and there are one or two neat sequences, but the druggy fug that hangs over the whole thing, which means we never know if what is happening is real or not, also means that we don't really care much either way. Martin Parsons

★★

One God but many Religions.

WHY?

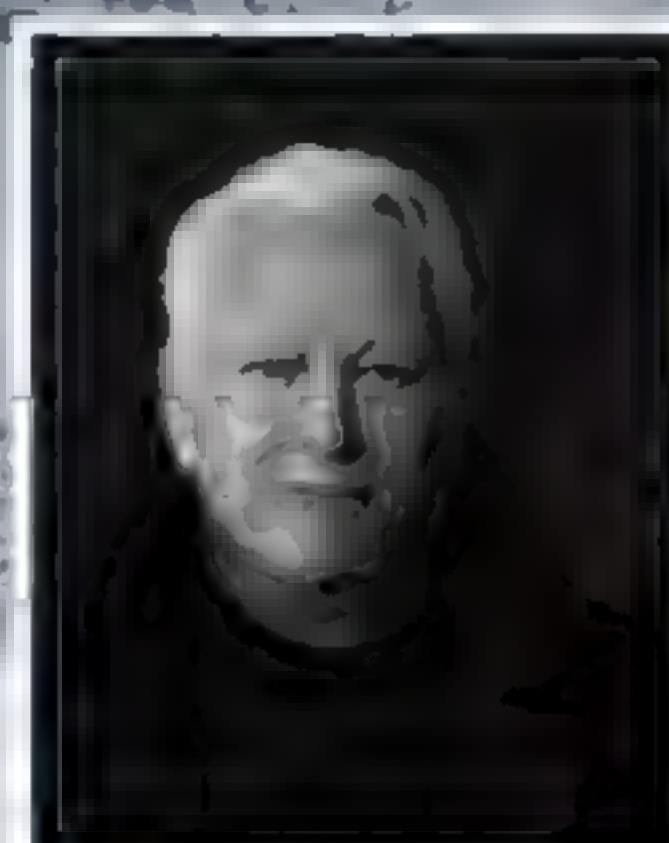
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**The
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All coming together

It has become fairly commonplace for spirits, and EMF readings, even voice messages from people who have died, to be picked up by mobile phones.

As we are all aware, computers, mobiles, etc all have a heart that is vital to their use: a tiny quartz crystal. Quartz is also renowned for being a 'stone tape' and granite comprises 20 per cent quartz crystal.

I have learned of many examples of strange repetitive occurrences in places built with granite, for example the Overtoun Bridge (the dog suicide bridge in Scotland, see **FT196:4, 218:10**) and Berry Pomeroy Castle in Devon. Mediaeval buildings, so many in Scotland of course which is notoriously full of tales of hauntings that repeat. And a vast amount in the USA, too many to mention here – but you can easily find them.

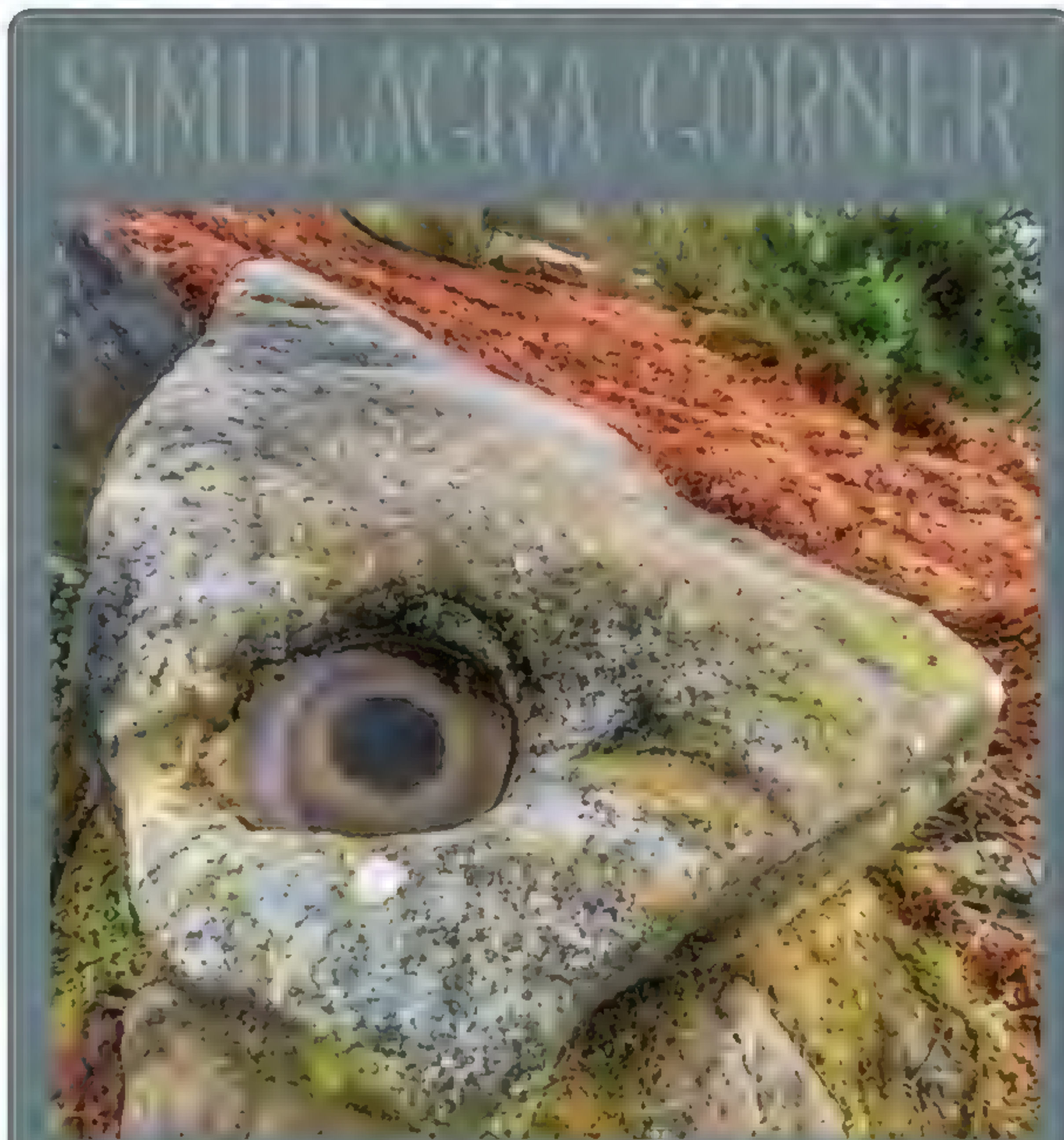
Whilst reading Lee Brickley's superb book, *Ghosts in the Machine: The Intersection of the Supernatural and AI – An Investigation into the Paranormal Presence in Modern Technology*, it all became clear. I have long been wary regarding crystals, but I'm less so these days. It is clear that crystal quartz can and does retain memories... or vibrations. How beautiful it is that science and the paranormal – the physical and the metaphysical – are slowly becoming aligned.

Kay Allen-Prout
Conwy, Wales

Regarding Stu Neville's discussion of one of the subjects (Dog Suicide Bridge) covered in TV's *The Unexplained Files* [**FT465:63**], there is a short documentary about Dr David Sands's experiment to seek an explanation for the tragedies which can be viewed at:

https://science.howstuffworks.com/science-vs-myth/unexplained-phenomena/dog-suicide-bridge.htm?fbclid=IwAR2bsEy-F5xzx-yz14eTVHv5rbg48l3KY4m9fB-54MRWxR8ucK2guidrF_bs0

Andy Owens
Halifax, West Yorkshire



This image of a rocky fish or dragon with a very realistic looking eye taken by Lee Pugh and posted to Facebook was in fact a "fantastic frost pattern in the hollow of a rock" on Stanton Moor Edge, Derbyshire. "I noticed it looking at me – I couldn't believe how lifelike it was with the thick layer of frost," said Mr Pugh.

We are always glad to receive pictures of supernatural beings and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sieveking@forteantimes.com

Sunbows

Just a quick note to expand upon Bob Rickard's comment on the 'Sunbow' photographs [**FT435:66**]. Working down the photos, I can make out the circumzenithal arc, the supralateral arc or perhaps the 46-degree halo, the upper tangent arc and the 22-degree halo. There is perhaps a suggestion of the parhelic circle with sundogs or parhelia on either side of the Sun. The circumzenithal arc and the sundogs are formed from the interaction of light with flat hexagonal ice crystals; the upper tangent arc and the 22-degree halo form columnar hexagonal ice crystals and interaction with the two types form the parhelic circle.

For further details, readers might like to visit Les Cowley's website Atmospheric Optics <https://atoptics.co.uk/> or consult *Color and Light in Nature* by David K Lynch and William Livingston (Cambridge University Press, 2001, 2nd ed, chapter 5: Ice and halos; or the classic *Light and Color in the Outdoors* by Marcel Minnaert (Springer, 1992 5th ed, chapter 10: Rainbows, halos and coronas.

Alan McIntosh
Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire

Guarding the gold

As an archaeologist I always enjoy perusing Paul Sieveking's archaeology column. However, a few details were missing from his piece on El Dorado's guardian [**FT434:13**] that would be interest-

ing to know. Firstly, the actual location of the 'face'; secondly, is it a natural feature akin to FT's Simulacra Corner but interpreted as a face; or is there evidence of the features being created by carving into the rock (unclear from the photo)?

Dr Stephen Muller
Adelaide, Australia

Paul Sieveking comments: The face of Harakbut was discovered in 2014, and the consensus is that it is a natural rock simulacrum of a face. It is in a very remote location and has yet to be studied scientifically. The local people maintain it was known to their ancestors for many generations.

Margaret Murray

I really enjoyed the Margaret Murray feature [**FT435:30-37**] and it got me thinking of works of fiction that reference the witch-cult in Western Europe. As far as I know it's mentioned in Lovecraft's *Call of Cthulhu* and I was amused to find it was also discovered in the library of Norman Bates in Robert Bloch's *Psycho*. Do any readers know of any other stories that mention Murray's witch-cult?

Peter Leathley
Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear

Barnes & Noble

Today I found that the management of Barnes & Noble bookstore has decreed that *Fortean Times* is to be in the "entertainment/horror" section; that's with the comic books and the dozen or so magazines about Harry Styles and the like. It used to be in the "science/technology" section, which is where I expect it to be, based on the contents. I was told that the recent change in B&N management resulted in the store no longer organising books by author in each section.

Michael Holt
By email

Gauguin's colours

Some time ago, I wrote in about an article written by Dr Karl Shuker on strange birds in Gauguin's

LETTERS



Bedd-Yr-Afanc

I was intrigued to read the sorry tale of the Afanc of Betws-Y-Coed in Nina Antonia's excellent article, "Postcards from Fairyland" [FT433:32-39]. The story seemed familiar to me as we have a very similar legend here in Pembrokeshire in southwest Wales; but not only do we have the legend, we have the grave of the beast too!

At the foot of the Preseli mountains in the village of Brynberian, a fearsome water monster known as the Afanc wreaked havoc, stealing animals and laying waste to the countryside. To bring an end to the creature's reign of terror, the villagers hatched a plan. They used a beautiful maiden as bait and lured the Afanc out of its pool during a full moon. With powerful oxen and iron chains, they captured the entranced creature. A fierce battle ensued, and the villagers eventually defeated

the monster, leaving it dead on the riverbank. In celebration, they buried it in a unique burial chamber on the moor, now called Bedd-Yr-Afanc, commemorating their triumphant victory over the mythical beast.

Or so the story goes. Brian John gives a much more lyrical account of the above in his 1992 book, *The Last Dragon – A Book Of Pembrokeshire Folk Tales* p.61, citing sources of J Rhys, 1901, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (2 vols), Oxford, p.689. and JC Davies, 1911, "Folk-lore of Mid and West Wales", *Welsh Gazette*, Aberystwyth, p.325. He also references the North Wales Afanc.

He further comments that "some authorities believe that the word Afanc originally meant 'dwarf', whereas in modern Welsh it means a beaver." Neither of which really make sense in the context of the legend.

During a recent spell of dry weather, with a friend and my faithful hound, I revisited the Bedd-Yr-Afanc burial chamber on the moorland near Brynberian. It is a very peculiar monument, and to my eyes reminds me of the outline of a boat or perhaps a whale.

Gavin Lloyd Wilson—
Glandwr, Pembrokeshire

paintings [FT409:42-46]. What was interesting was that he had identified a bird thought to be extinct. The problem was that Gauguin was notorious with his use of colours and I pointed out that you should not rely on the accuracy of colours in his paintings. Dr Shuker's response was that he "couldn't see anything amiss". Unfortunately, this answer rankled with me. I would ask him to look at the trees – they are blue and brown! Clearly if the flora is not painted in its true colours what possible justification can there be for assuming that the fauna is?

Dr Peter WH Smith
Watton At Stone, Hertfordshire

Nature of evidence

- With regard to Martin Stubbs's letter [FT431:66], it is down to belief, not facts. What would he accept as evidence? What does he mean by evidence? How can you have solid evidence of something that isn't solid? If UFOs etc are subjective and you

reject them, why do you accept thought as real, and where is your proof it exists? How much does a word weigh? What size is it?

- As for Erich Fitch's letter that follows, how can you measure what an advanced race is capable of, including ourselves compared to ancient man? Look at the doubters about getting into the air, let alone space and people suffocating if a train travels faster than 10 miles an hour.

- As for Nessie, that argument was put to bed ages ago as like a snake its head moved on a horizontal plane, not a vertical one, making heads sticking out of water unlikely for this species. Ted Halliday suggested *Tullimonstrum gregarium* as a possibility and Bernard Heuvelmans thought it might be a pinniped (seal).

- Preston Dennett in his fourth volume of *Not From Here* mentioned that the Fourth of July

celebrations had the greatest number of UFO sightings of the year in the US. I wonder if this is the same for the rest of the world – Chinese New Year, Western New Year (Edinburgh, Sydney in Australia etc), Diwali in India...

Tony Sandy
By email

David Grusch

I feel Nigel Watson went into overdrive attempting to debunk the claims of US whistleblower David Grusch [FT434:28]. His claims were presented as rubbish and, wherever possible, details were presented in a suspicious light. For instance, my understanding was that the decision to publish quickly in *The Debrief* was taken out of concern for Grusch's personal safety, but Mr Watson ignored that possibility and described it as a 'red flag'. But what he cannot deny are Grusch's impeccable credentials, the fact that Congress seems to be taking him seriously and the fact that NASA are finally taking

an interest in UFO/UAPs (they set up a public panel for this purpose in June).

I accept that it isn't (quite yet) the smoking gun – Grusch's material is hearsay, but is consistent with what many reputable ufologists' research has turned up over the years (e.g. Kevin Randle).

In the light of Richard Freeman's letter [FT433:66-67], in which he criticised FT's culture of excessive scepticism, do your readers not deserve a more balanced reporting of such an interesting and important development?

Geoff Clifton
Solihull, West Midlands

- Reading Nigel Watson's UFO column [FT434:28-29], I cannot help noticing a distinct facial resemblance between UFO whistleblower David Grusch and 1980s UFO allegor John Lear, whose photo appears on page 29. It's almost like looking at Grusch in 30 years' time.

What if the aliens do walk

amongst us – posing as UFO whistleblowers and high-level intelligence officials? Maybe, being aliens, they don't get how important the minute differences in facial composition are to us humans, and have fallen into that classic alien trap of using the same basic design when constructing a human facial disguise?

Rhiannon Jones
By email

Poor John alone!

- Regarding the Wandering Jew pattern identified by Simon Young [FT433:29], I think at least one of the characters self-identified as such, and at least one didn't – according to the article he only ever uttered one phrase. The self-identification could just have been to give the tramp(s) a sense of mystery or perceived importance. Or perhaps one or more of them was actually Jewish. If a tramp was given the title, presumably by the locals, I think this would simply have been a nickname, as images online tend to show the 'real' Wandering Jew as a tramp-like figure. As regards the Bath tramp's utterance of "Poor Joe's alone!", perhaps his name was Joe, and he was bemoaning his loneliness.

- I think the phrase "Poor John alone!" could have a more interesting origin. According to the online Oxford Reference, Poor John is a term that seamen used for a cheap and unpopular salted fish ration they were sometimes given on British Navy warships. Perhaps the Newcastle tramp and his Scottish counterpart were ex-seamen, and being of somewhat unsound mind, were simply bemoaning the fact that they had ended their careers on ships which would only give them this unwelcome ration. I suppose the Newcastle and Scotland tramps could have been the same person, but I would hazard a guess that that lifestyle doesn't promote longevity, and I would plump for a coincidence. I hope I have helped to bolster Simon Young's sanity.

- There were certainly some striking images in "Postcards



Prince Colibri

FT seems to have missed that the two photos of the French giant Henri Cot [FT432:69] are in fact the same exposure, differing only in elements of contrast and the appearance of the tiny 'Prince Colibri'. A careful comparison of the subjects will show them to be in all other ways identical.

I suspect from the rather vague shape of the skirt and the extra inexplicable shadow

from Fairyland" [FT433:32-39]. One fairy site that wasn't mentioned was Pouk Hill, in Walsall, West Midlands. This hill featured on the cover of the (Ambrose) Slade album *Beginnings*, and in the song "Pouk Hill" on the Slade album *Play It Loud*, where the band recall standing shirtless in the freezing cold to pose for the photo. Now there's a famous landmark for you!

Dave Miles
By email

Future TV

I remember the TV broadcast from the late Eighties ['Time travel hoax' FT433:69], but if anything my memories are even vaguer than Tim's. I think it happened during a break, and possibly early evening? I don't remember what channel, TV fuzz filled the screen for a moment, and a voiceover said it was a broadcast from the future. It was



in the righthand image that the miniscule 'Prince' was crudely airbrushed *out* rather than pasted *into* the left-hand image. How did he fall from grace I wonder, to deserve such Stalinist treatment?

Ryan Shirlow
Leeds, West Yorkshire

Editor's note: Cot seems to have gained a moustache in the second one, as well as losing the prince!

really very short. Did it say the broadcast was from 2020? Seems particularly unlikely now, since the atmosphere was all 'Universal harmony-ish'.

I also recall there was nothing in the way of announcers apologising for difficulties, and I definitely recall being freaked out by it, but pending any mention anywhere of it, I had simply filed it under 'weird stuff', and whole decades went by without my thinking of it.

If it was an advert or a hoax, I must have missed any follow-ups. I would be intrigued to find a recording, though that seems unlikely.

Dean Teasdale
Gateshead, Tyne & Wear

Bob Rickard comments:
"Transmissions from the future" – whether in

dreams or via radio or TV – is a familiar story-telling trope in SF media as it easily feeds into some unexpected ending twist. It can be seen as a variant of going back in time to change yourself. I expect a search will come up with many examples – *Primer*, *The Butterfly Effect* and *12 Monkeys* come to mind.

The Phyllis Diller Nudes

I have been trying to flog a science fiction short, 'The Phyllis Diller Nudes', for many years. (Any publishers out there, I'm cheap and send in very clean copy). It occurred to me, as I prepared the manuscript for yet another abortive submission, that the background to the tale is very fortean, and the actual story rather more interesting than the legend. Isn't that always the case?

The legend is that Miss Diller, famous for her biting comedy and outlandish hairdos, did a nude photo shoot for *Playboy*, but the pictures were so beautiful that the magazine didn't dare to publish them. Quite the claim for the foremost glamour publication of the 20th century.

The true story is that she did indeed pose naked for the magazine, but the intention was for the pictures to be a complete spoof. Unfortunately, *Playboy* had not taken into account that, while the

Continued on page 68



CLIVE GODDARD

What Happened to Me...

Mouse transformed

I'm certain this incident took place while I was returning from university to my parents' home in Runcorn, Cheshire, and I'm almost certain it took place in my final year, which would date it to 1993-1994.

I spotted the family cat, Moses, had caught yet another mouse and was bounding up the stairs with it in his maw. I pursued him and he ran into my parents' bedroom and under their bed. I dropped to the floor and could see him with the mouse in his mouth. I snapped at him to drop it, which he did. The mouse scurried away a few inches from its assailant and froze. Moses mooched away from under the bed in arch feline manner.

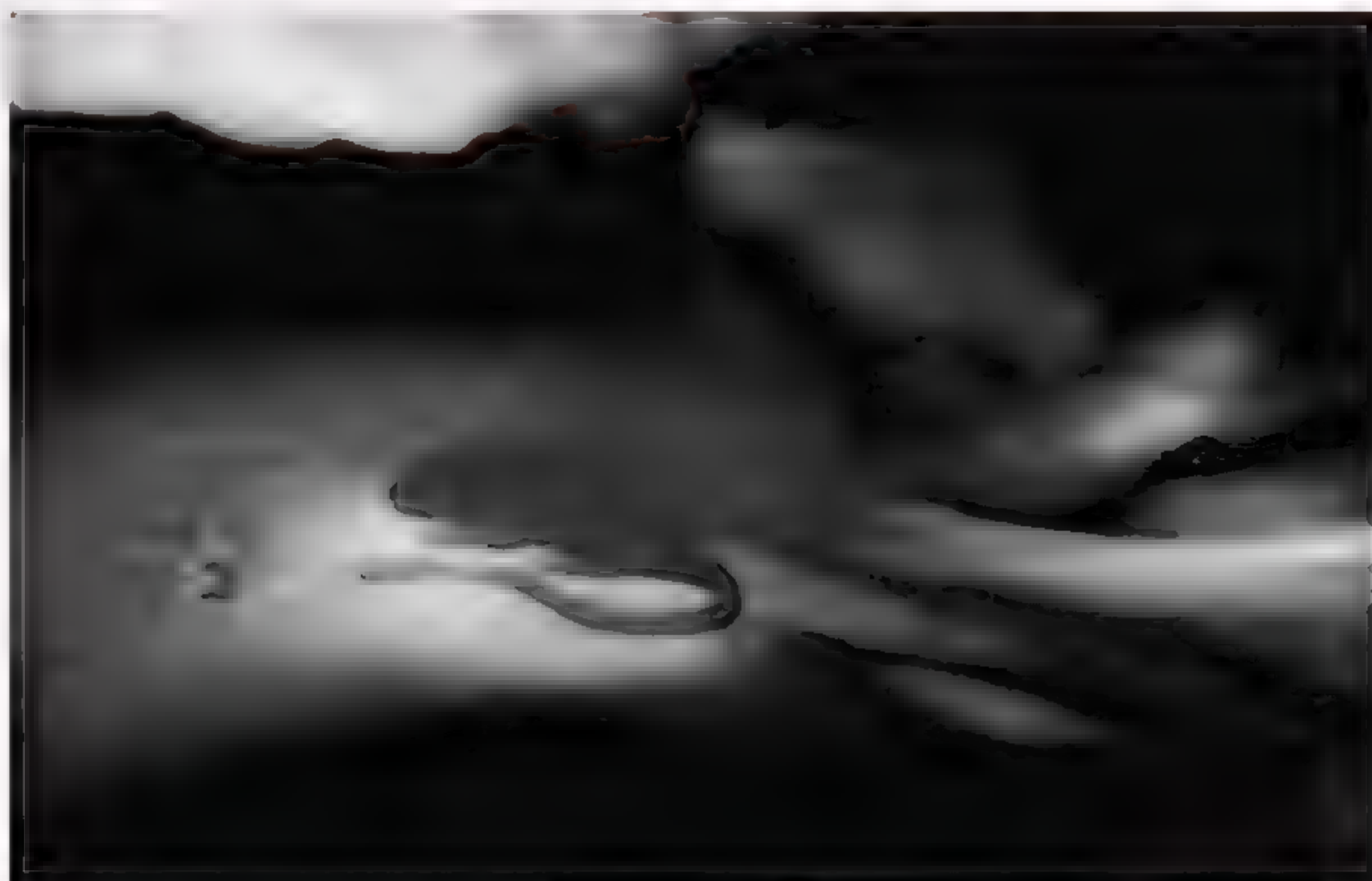
My mother used a walking stick, which was handily placed half under the bed, not too far from the now rigid mouse. I reached out for it and attempted to use it to coax the mouse towards me, with a view to rehabilitating it in the garden. However, it remained stock still and I began to fear it had died of shock or trauma. Realising I would have to dispose of the corpse in any event, I shuffled its body towards me, using the walking stick. Eventually the stiff body reached me, having rolled over along the way.

To my alarm I realised that the mouse, now lying on its back, had 'Made in China' or possibly 'Made in Hong Kong' imprinted on its underbelly and was clearly made of rubber. I am aware this sounds ridiculous, but I had not taken my eyes off it and had seen it run from Moses's mouth, once dropped, under the bed.

How could a live mouse transform into a manufactured, rubber one? The most rational explanation I have been able to come up with is that I experienced a kind of waking lucid dream. I am prone to lucid dreams, but they occur at night in bed rather than when wide awake in the middle of the day. Nothing felt dreamlike or trance-like about the experience. I remain absolutely perplexed by the incident to this day.

Daniel Clay

Formby, Merseyside



"The mouse scurried away a few inches from its assailant and froze. Moses mooched away from under the bed in arch feline manner"

"Hear my roar"

Back in 1995, when I was 16, I moved into a flat share with another college student on the third floor at the top of a family home. It was an old Victorian house and we were in what I assume were old servants' quarters and it had an odd layout. The bathroom was off a half-landing and the kitchen was at the top of the last flight of stairs, with our rooms either side of the kitchen.

As this was the mid-1990s, it must have been the first time the film *Batman Returns* was shown on TV. My flatmate and I saw the trailer multiple times over the course of a couple of weeks and were messing about doing not very good impressions of Michelle Pfeiffer saying "Hear my roar".

Fast forward to a typical day: I was in the bathroom and my flatmate was cooking in the kitchen. Out of nowhere I heard a whispered voice say "Hear my roar" right next to my ear. My blood ran cold. I rushed out of the bathroom and, as I reached the bottom of the stairway to the kitchen, began accusing my flatmate of trying to scare me. Only she was also obviously shaken up and said that she'd heard the same phrase whispered in her ear.

After a minute or two of each

insisting that the other was responsible, it became clear that neither one of us could have snuck up on the other to play this trick. The distance between my position in the bathroom was at least 10m [33ft] away from the kitchen, through one closed door and with that flight of stairs in between. That's when we both realised quite how impossible the event actually was.

I've pondered this many times over the years and I've come up with no explanation other than some 'thing' was deliberately imitating us. Bearing in mind this was the 1990s, were tiny discreet speakers capable of directional sound even available? Especially on a student budget? I just don't see how this phenomenon could have been faked.

This wasn't the first time that a poltergeist had been mentioned at the flat share. Our landlady was convinced that we were smoking upstairs and got quite shirty about it. This happened several times when it was just me in the house and I never smoked. We began attributing this phantom smell to a poltergeist as it happened quite often.

One last bit of weirdness: I was staying in the house while my flatmate and the family were away. From the top of the house I could hear furniture being moved downstairs, as if people were

sitting down to eat at the dining table: the sound of chairs scraping on a wooden floor. At first I thought it might be a burglar, yet despite my nerves I set off down the stairs to see what was occurring.

As I descended the final steps, the sound stopped. Being rather afraid, I decided to go back upstairs, only for the noise to start up again as I reached the final flight of steps to the third floor. Feeling genuinely freaked out, I again went back downstairs. Again the noise stopped as I was descending the stairs to the ground floor. This time I summoned the courage to look – and you won't be surprised to learn that there was no obvious source of the noise. Somewhat stunned, I then checked the doors, windows and security alarm. All was as it should be.

There was an amusing coda of my time in this flat. After a year I moved to my own flat and within a couple of days of arriving I smelled 'phantom smoke'. For a day or two I was genuinely worried that the 'thing' had followed me. Luckily enough, it soon became clear that my upstairs neighbour was a pipe smoker!

FH [name on file]

By email

Spectral throttler

For the last 20 years I've been aware of spirits and ghosts that seem to share houses with me. It started off with noises and strange shadows but has recently turned more hostile. My husband and I moved to an old army property in Hampshire about six years ago. One night I fell asleep on my back and dreamt that a man had walked to my side of the bed and started to throttle me. I woke up coughing and gasping, still feeling the pressure around my neck and chest. This hasn't happened again, but occasionally I'll feel a slight pressure around my throat as if he is trying to do it again. It only happens when I'm home alone and never when my husband is around.

Becky— [name on file]

Hampshire

Glitch in speech

This morning over breakfast my girlfriend was talking to me and said the same words twice, like when a digital/sky TV programme skips back and then carries on. When I asked her about saying the words twice she said "Did I? I don't know", as if she didn't even know anything about it. Now, I stutter and this wasn't like stuttering. I've never heard it in live conversation before.

Rik Spencer

Grimsby, Lincolnshire

Fast orbs

It was between the hours of 8 and 10pm on a weekday (as I recall), and I was standing out the front of my house with my father and his girlfriend. We were all doing some quick stargazing with some newly purchased astronomy binoculars and were standing outside talking for about 10 minutes, whilst scanning the night sky. I then I caught two fast-moving orbs (that at first resembled stars) ascending upwards from behind a large warehouse on the opposite side of our street. They were definitely moving, made no audible sound, and caught my attention without the use of my binoculars. My father's girlfriend also witnessed these orbs, and confirmed her sighting and experience with both of us, as my father had missed them.

They appeared to be solid white orbs with blue edges, that looked very much like large stars, but they ascended from behind a warehouse and, once pointed out, after roughly five seconds of moving upwards, they disappeared. This may leave room to suggest that they were conscious of my thoughts and actions in pointing them out, or recognised that they were being observed. A few seconds after the orbs vanished, a huge comet or some space junk flew past. We were all amazed at how beautiful and how huge it was.

After this experience, I have caught glimpses of many other orbs (possibly UFOs, or even the manifestations of angels/demons?) above Newcastle's city skyline. Among my sightings I have observed stars that seemingly jolt around the night



"There was a row of houses, living room windows bleeding light and street lights illuminating from above where I knew there were none"

sky before becoming stationary. These do not look or feel like hallucinations or delusions, as they too have been witnessed by others.

What I've noticed is that these orbs, entities, beings, or craft can fade in and out of the material reality/dimension, so is it possible they're dimensional beings that can dematerialise at will, or even beings that hold messages from the spirit realm, that can be deciphered symbolically and metaphorically?

Jack Milsom

Australia

Who turned the duvet?

My partner worked as a nurse in a care-home before she retired, a job which entailed working 12-hour shifts, from eight in the morning until eight at night. Travel and hand-over would generally take this well over 13 hours, which meant she was rarely home before 9pm. If she worked two or three days in a row, she would often go to bed early, after a bath, a quick meal and a brief chat.

One evening, after she had come back, I ran her bath and made her something to eat. As she was eating her meal, I popped upstairs to visit the bathroom. Looking into the bedroom, I noticed that the duvet on her side had been

turned back, just at the corner. She sometimes liked to do this, preparing the duvet for going to bed. I assumed she had done this after taking her bath, and went back downstairs.

We chatted for less than an hour, then my partner retired to bed. A few moments later, I received a text from her – "Thanks very much for turning the duvet down for me. That was a nice touch!". I messaged back to tell her she was most welcome, and to sleep tight, etc.

It wasn't till she was back next evening that I told her it wasn't me who had turned down the duvet, but that I hadn't told her the night before because I knew she wouldn't sleep if she knew this. So, she hadn't turned it down, and I hadn't turned it down, and there were only two of us in the house.

Stan Sweeney

Shotts, Lanarkshire

Ghostly houses

For many years I have been a part-time lecturer at De Montfort University in Leicester, and so my commute along the A47 from Leicester to Peterborough (mostly) through Rutland became very familiar.

Driving back home, I used to pass the Old Rutland Inn – now a private residence – which

would be on my left, and I look out for it as a marker, as many years before I and a few mates had popped in there for a pint while it was a pub.

On a really foggy night in the autumn or winter some years back, markers were welcome as a point of reference. There had been some roadworks for a few weeks with night illuminations, but these had been completed and so large stretches of the A47 only had cat's eyes and oncoming cars for company. On reaching the Old Rutland Inn, I knew I was making good progress. Passing this location, the road veers left and then right, and suddenly (although foggy) the roads were no longer bounded by country hedges and fences.

Instead on either side of the road it was as if there was a row of houses, living room windows bleeding light and street lights illuminating from above where I knew there were none. They were indistinct, almost but not quite present given the dense fog conditions, set back from the road a little. As I drove through, my brain was screaming that this wasn't right, they shouldn't be there. Part of me wanted to stop but soon it was over and the fog and darkness closed around the car once more and I kept going.

I was eager to make the trip once more both in daytime and the return night-time trip, but I never saw the ghostlike houses again, only cats' eyes and white stripes.

Clifton Stewart

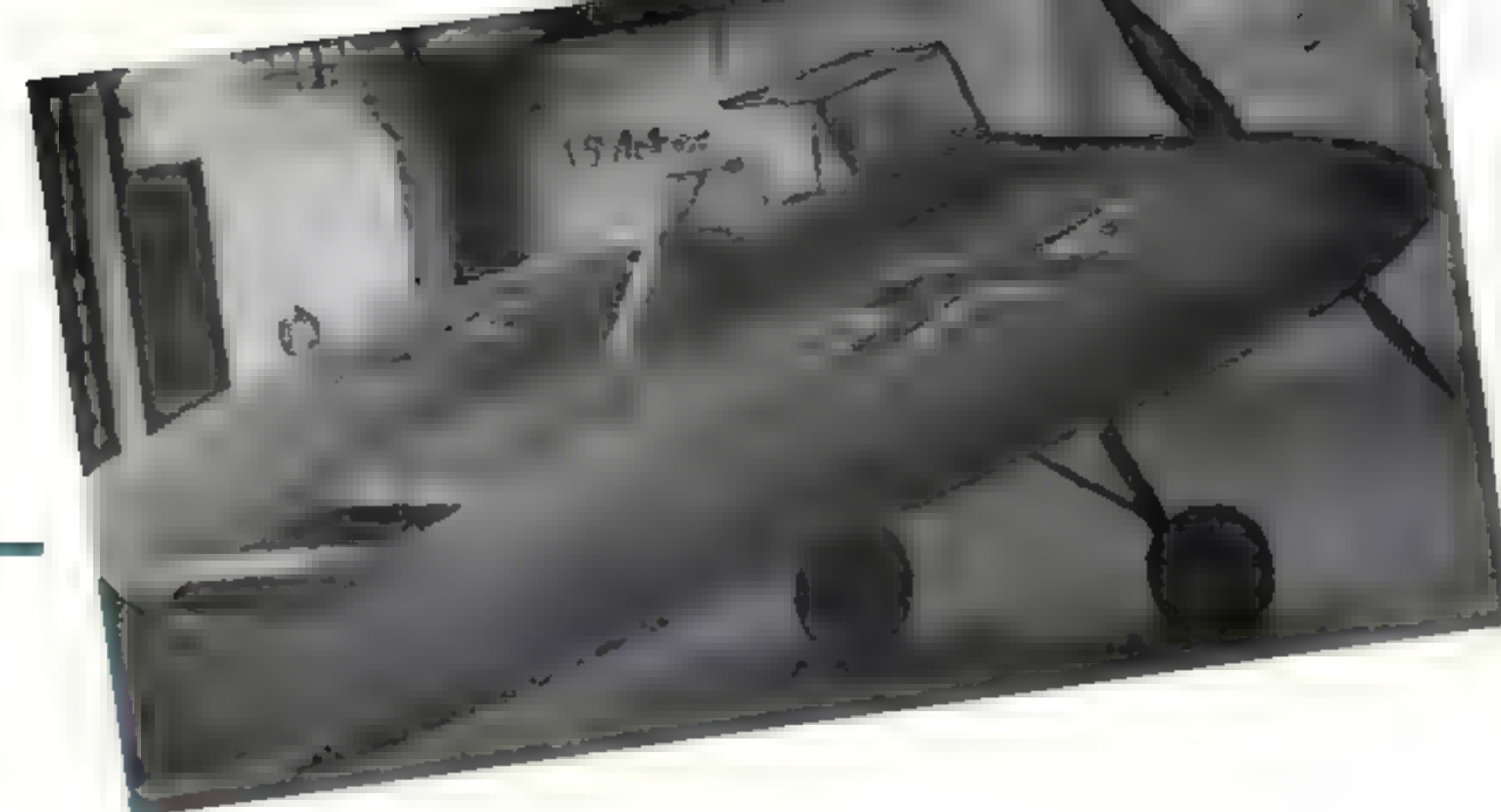
By email

Library angel...

A few years back I was researching in archives, where I regularly went, normally doing transcriptions. On one occasion I was trying to find out about my grandmother, who as a 12-year-old was a pupil teacher at the local primary school. I obtained the relevant school logbook / school record and searched through without success. A fellow archivist called me over to help decipher some signatures. Returning to my own research, I found the book open at the right page. Was this down to chance – or was some sort of library angel at work?

Peter Jackson

St Ives, Cambridgeshire



lady perhaps did not have model looks, she was far from the frightful harridan she presented on stage.

In her own words, “They thought [...] a really thin woman would be funny. I was hot as a pistol in the Sixties, and they thought I was skinny. Well, I never was bony-ugly skinny – I was shaped like a lady, and I actually had big t-ts! – so I wasn’t what they were looking for at all.” (Source TVGuide.com 2006)

I find as I get older that I am increasingly baffled by people’s contempt, possibly fear, of the truth. I’m with Dustin Hoffman’s Captain Hook in the eponymous movie of 1992: “Lie? Me? [laughs] Never. [Inhales deeply again] The truth is far too much fun.”

Bob Johnston

By email

Newby ghost photo

I was about 17 when I first saw the Arthur C Clarke programmes on Belgian television – circa 1985-86. I admit the Newby ghost photograph [FT433:44 – taken in Newby church near Rippon in Yorkshire by Rev Kenneth Lord in 1963] gave me chills. But, almost 40 years later, some things make me doubt the veracity of it.

I never came across technical details about it: what was the ASA speed of the film, or what time of day was it taken? There was never any doubt about it being a double exposure, but, as I later learned when attending a photography course, it could well be a long exposure – this is why I deem the ASA speed important. Crucially, I – and probably others – noticed that it looks as if the robe or habit follows the contours of the altar steps. The ghost seems to make direct eye-contact with the photographer, and I admit this contributes to the eeriness of the photograph.

In my humble opinion it is a very good trick photo. On the other hand, it wouldn’t be the first time I made an error.

Erwin Snelders

Antwerp, Belgium

Odd bookmarks

Regarding the letter on “Odd Bookmarks” [FT434:66]: years ago, in my London days, I had my

own antiquarian book-dealing business, which involved exhibiting at book fairs; and there was a man who always used to come round – not because he collected books, but because he collected the bus tickets people used as bookmarks. And he could immediately identify the bus number, and the details and history of the bus route, just from looking at the ticket.

As for what people used as bookmarks in earlier times: before setting up on my own I worked for an antiquarian bookseller, from whom I learned it was not uncommon in the 18th century for readers to use strips of bacon rind. A most memorable acquisition had been a book whose owner had marked their place with a fried egg. Over the decades this thing had oxidised and eaten its way through the pages, leaving a large lacuna edged with sulphuric green. Needless to say, the book achieved pride of place in the shop’s window display for a while. It was long before my time, so I never saw it; but it had become something of a legend in the bookseller’s history.

Julie Speedie

York

Check your saucers

I’m sorry to hear Mark Pearson didn’t like my Nazi UFOs article in FT430:44-49 [see letter FT434:64], but he seems to misunderstand how a promotional article for a book works. All the things he complains about me not mentioning are discussed at length in my actual book (*Nazi UFOs: The Legends and Myths of Hitler’s Flying Saucers in WW2*, Pen & Sword/Frontline, 2022). There is a long section about how Kenneth Arnold described his original 1947 ‘saucers’ as being crescent or bat-wing shaped, and several pages about the related Horten-229 myth. There is a full chapter about other genuine Nazi *Wunderwaffen*, too, and every single one of the plans/working weapons he chides me for not detailing – Project Silbervogel, the Sun Cannon, the alleged dirty bomb-equipped V2 and Hannah Reitsch’s abortive plan for transforming V-1s into pilotable aerial suicide-bombs – are discussed.

Unfortunately, while the book is about 73,000 words and 201 pages long, the extract article was only about 3,000 words and six pages long, much of the space being taken up by images, so I didn’t have space to mention everything! As such, I simply linked together a few parts I personally found most interesting or entertaining; so the story about the moronic fake Hitler-impersonator in 1940s America was in there simply because I thought it amusing and therefore likely to make readers buy the book, not because it somehow ‘proves’ the Nazis built no saucers, as is implied.

As far as is known, the only circular-type aircraft the Nazis ever built was the Sack AS-6 (above), which does indeed look a bit saucer-shaped, but was ultimately abandoned due to it being completely useless. Yes, the Nazis investigated unusual propulsion-methods, as Pearson says, successfully developing jet- and rocket-engines for planes, but this is all very different from saying they tried to build flying saucers, a concept which did not exist until 1947. All ‘evidence’ they were trying to build full-size saucer-shaped craft other than the Sack AS-6 is fake, invented post-war by dubious figures like Rudolf Schriever, Major Rudolf Luser, Giuseppe Belluzzo, Joseph Andreas Epp, etc, either for money or out of revanchist pro-Nazi motives. I do show this at length in the other 70,000 words of the actual book.

● In answer to Ian I’Anson’s other letters-page query about what precise (real-life) craft the alleged swastika-bearing ‘Himmelkompass’ came from, by the way, I’m afraid I have no idea either! His point about gyrocompasses eliminating the very need for a Himmelskompass in the first place was an excellent one, however, I hadn’t actually realised that myself – this fact in itself illustrates one of the main points of my book perfectly, i.e. that it is quite easy for conmen like Schriever, Luser, *et al*, to trick laymen into believing military absurdities simply by using long, technical-sounding words and pseudo-explanations of things.

SD Tucker

Widnes, Cheshire

Alien gatecrasher

A good mate of mine recently found this old photograph (below) of a group of top blokes on a train from Schipol Airport going to Amsterdam for a stag weekend circa 1993/1994. I’m the one wearing Harry Potter-style glasses. We have only just noticed the weird elongated silvery alien/Grey hand in the background. There was definitely no one behind us when the picture was taken.

Does ET like to drink Stella Artois with the lads on his day off from abducting humans or mutilating cattle?

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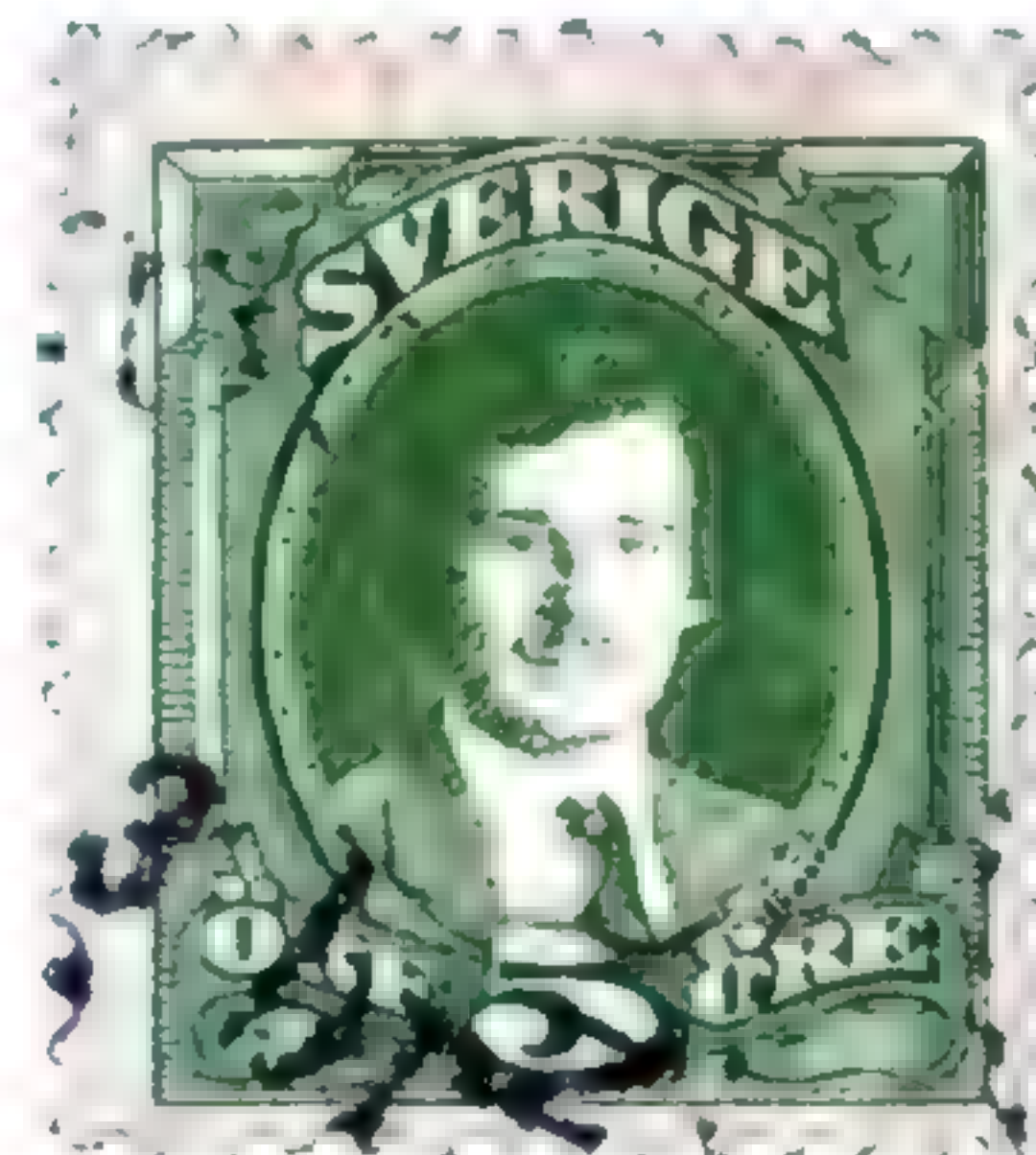
Bottoms Up!

Phil Sloan

Bexley Village, Greater London



PECULIAR POSTCARDS



JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past presents some splendid images of Old Jack Johnson, Merseyside's 'Hermit of the Sand Hills'

39. THE BLUNDELLSANDS HERMIT

Not long ago, I purchased some curious postcards showing a disgruntled-looking, bearded old man sitting on a table, placed on an open carriage drawn by a large horse that is wearing various decorations and ornaments. Two of the cards are marked 'Hermit of the Sand Hills'. Fortunately, the cards had a typewritten note attached, explaining that this was Jack Johnson, the Blundellsands Hermit, taking part in the May Day procession of 1907, along with a fife and drum band, the Fire Brigade, a troupe of Morris dancers, and various other attractions. The hermit is said to have drawn loud cheers as he trundled along on his float, brandishing his yoke and fish basket. The procession was twice halted for the hermit to be photographed.

Blundellsands is just to the north of Crosby, on the coast of Merseyside, which in turn is north of Liverpool. Its main forteen claim to fame is that it was the birthplace of Gerald Gardner, the founder of modern Wicca.

Jack Johnson is said to have been born around 1830. As a young man, he fought as a soldier in the Crimean War, before becoming a sailor, a gamekeeper and a fisherman. In middle age, he became a hermit, constructing a ramshackle hut in the sandhills, which he called 'Alt Cottage'. Jack lived there with his cat and his dog for 36 years, from 1871 onwards: his weather-beaten looks, disdain for washing and shaving, solitary habits and unpromising living accommodation led to him becoming the local hermit, and a minor celebrity in his own right. He fished for cockles, which he sold to curiosity-hunters who came to see him



ABOVE: The Hermit taking part in the 1907 May Day parade in Blundellsands. **RIGHT:** Another card, stamped and posted in Blundellsands in 1907, showing the Hermit sitting in his float, which is adorned with a sign describing him as the 'Hermit of the Sand Hills'. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** The humble hermitage of Alt Cottage, a card stamped and posted in Blundellsands in 1907.

at his cottage. Apart from the two postcards of Jack taking part in the May Day procession, there are at least three others: one showing the primitive-looking Alt Cottage, which is also reproduced here, another depicting the hermit with his dog, and a third showing him standing in front of a local landmark, the Crosby Boulder Stone. Local tradition has not recorded the ultimate fate of Jack Johnson, and there are too many with that name for his year of death to be traced using online tools.



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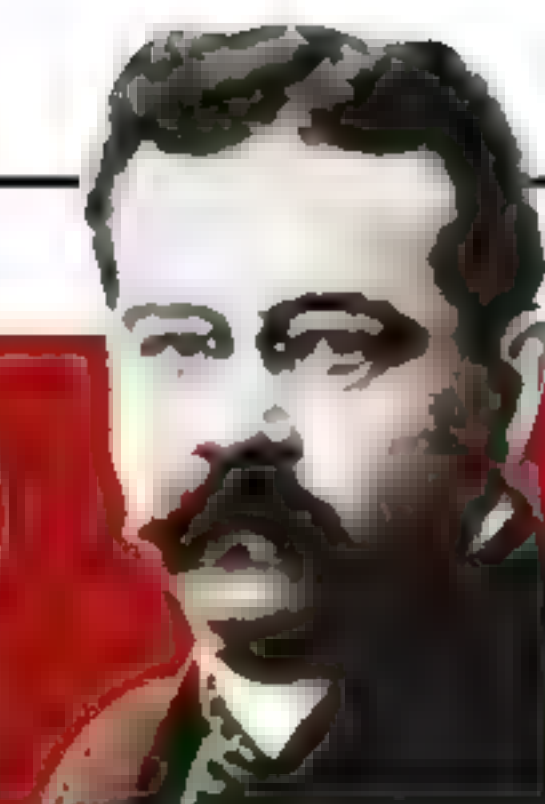
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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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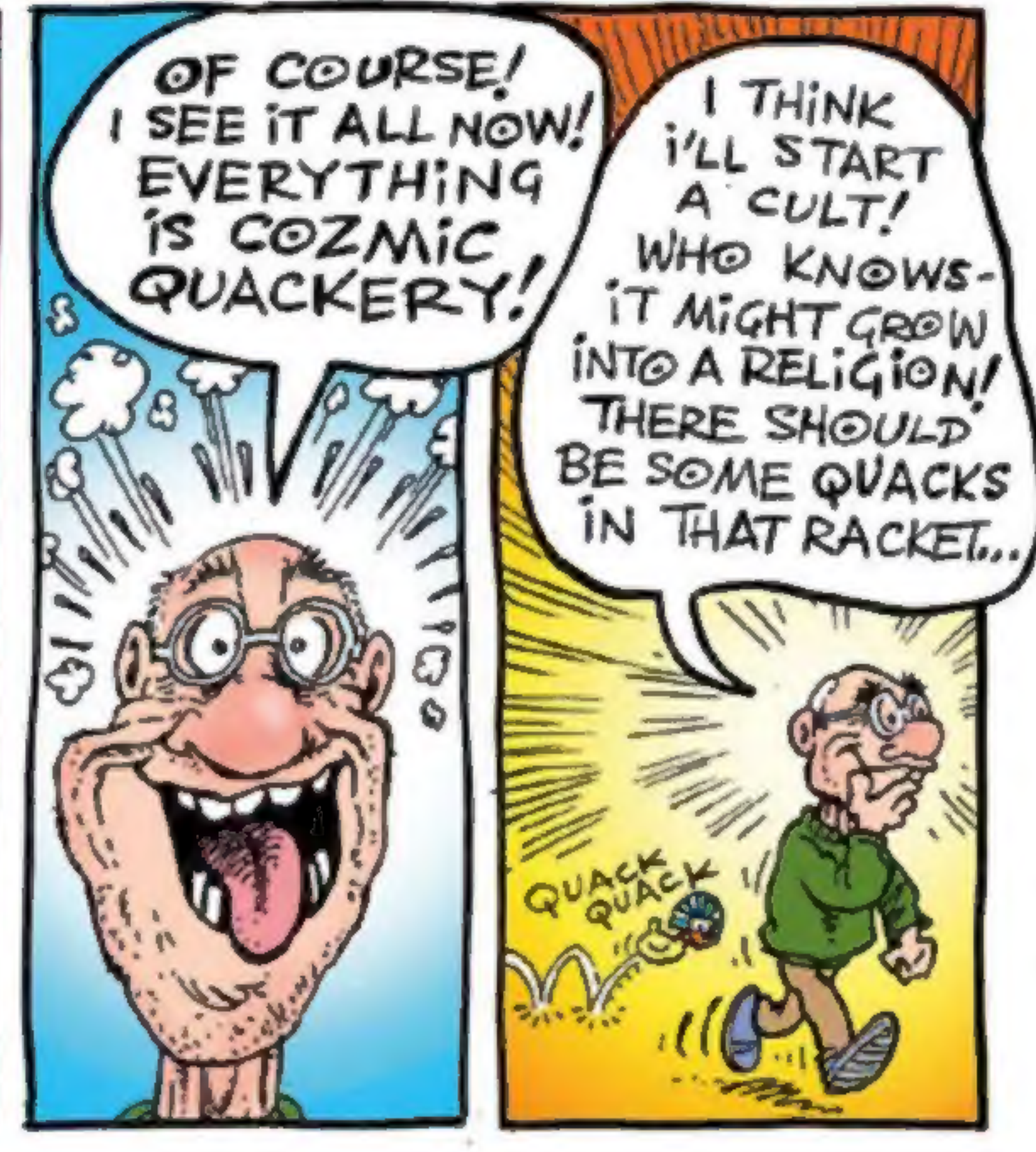
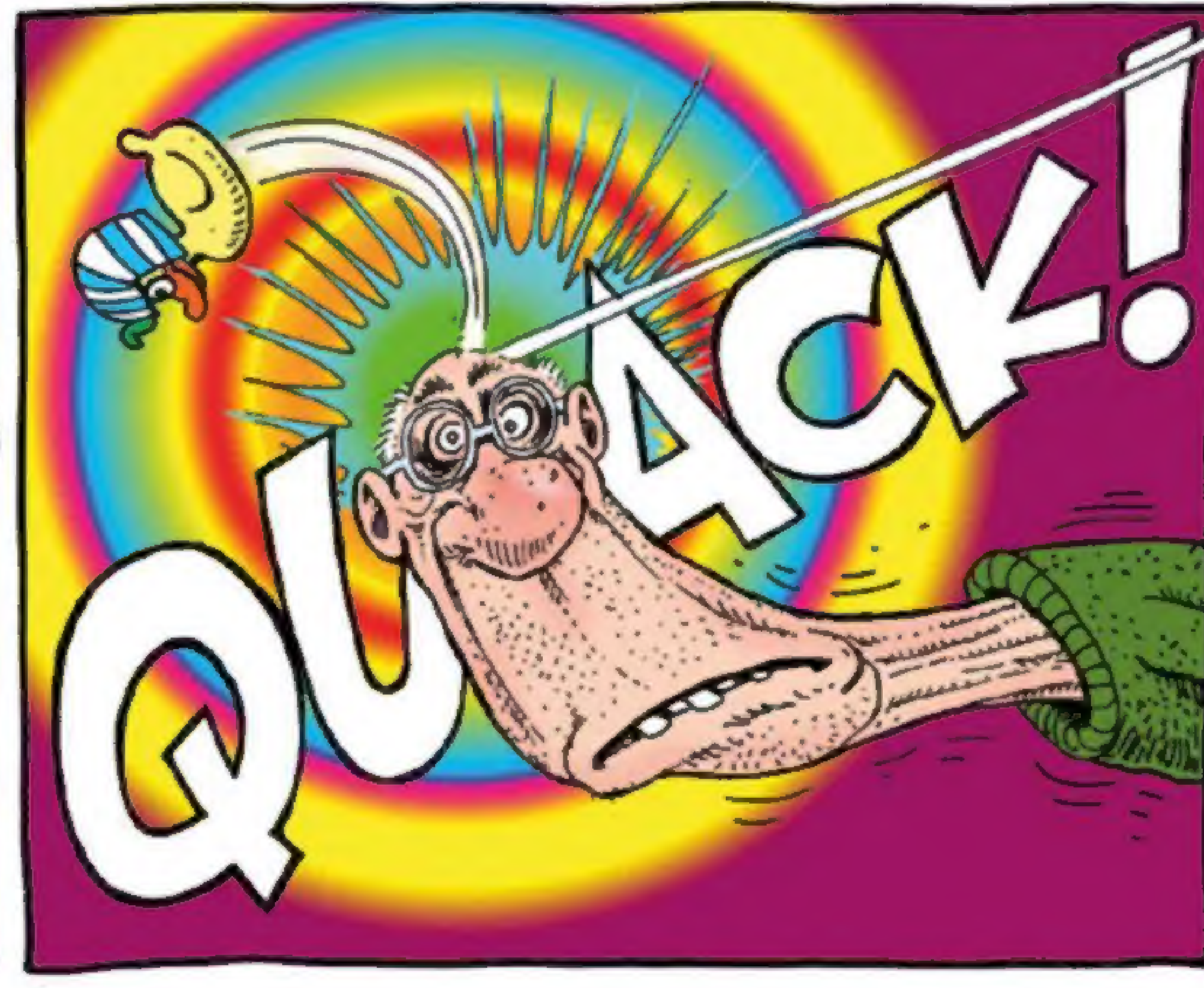
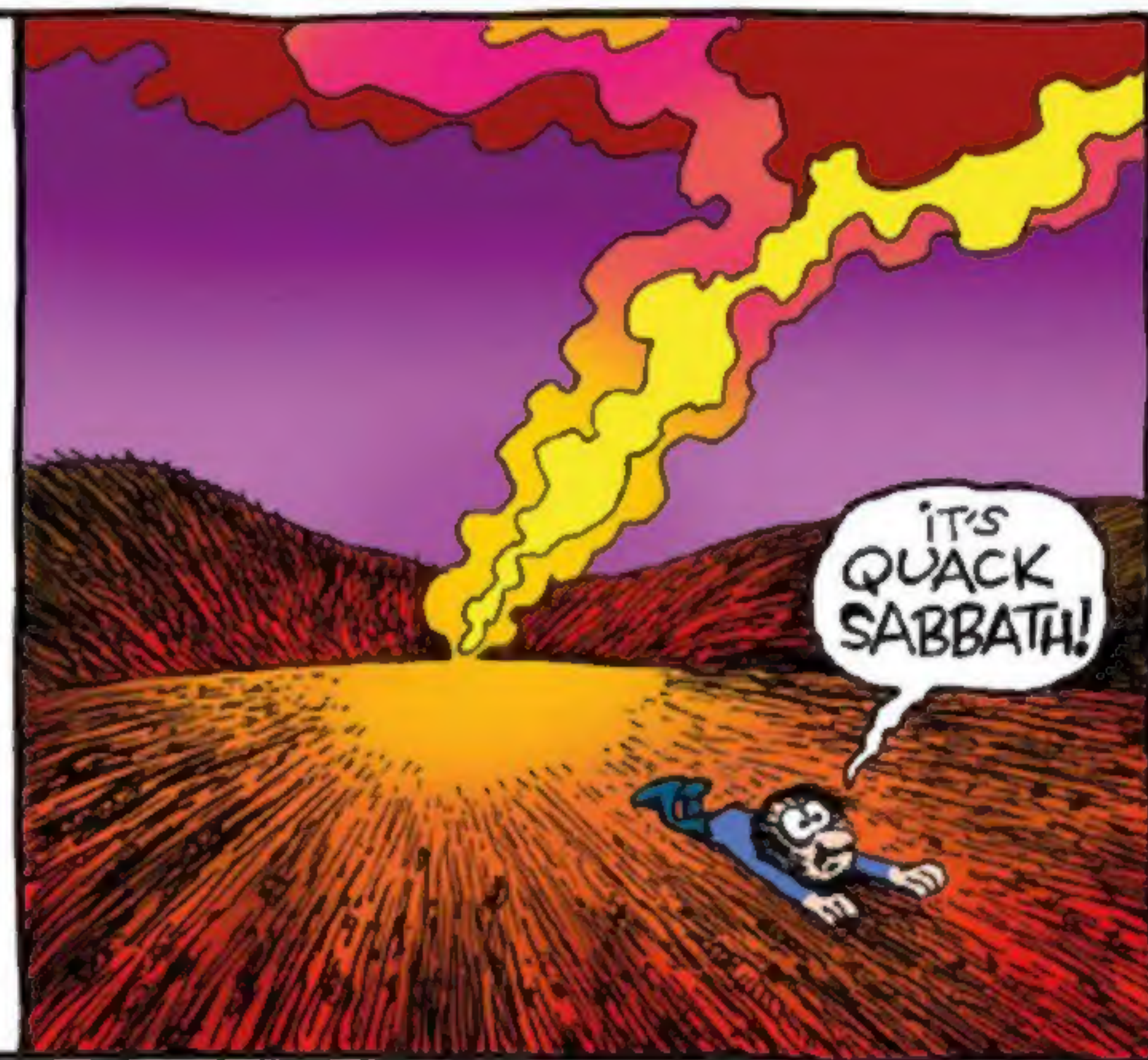
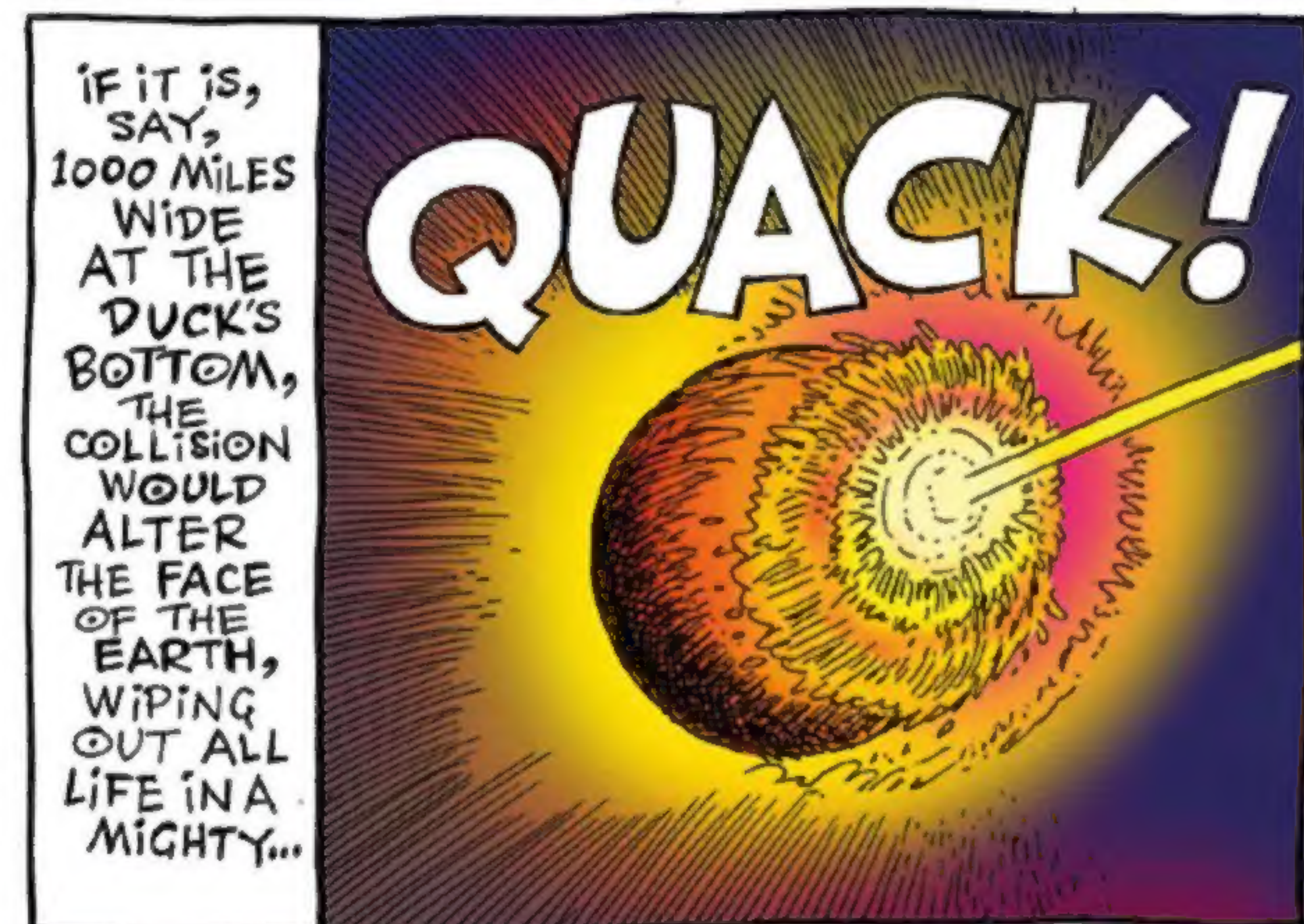
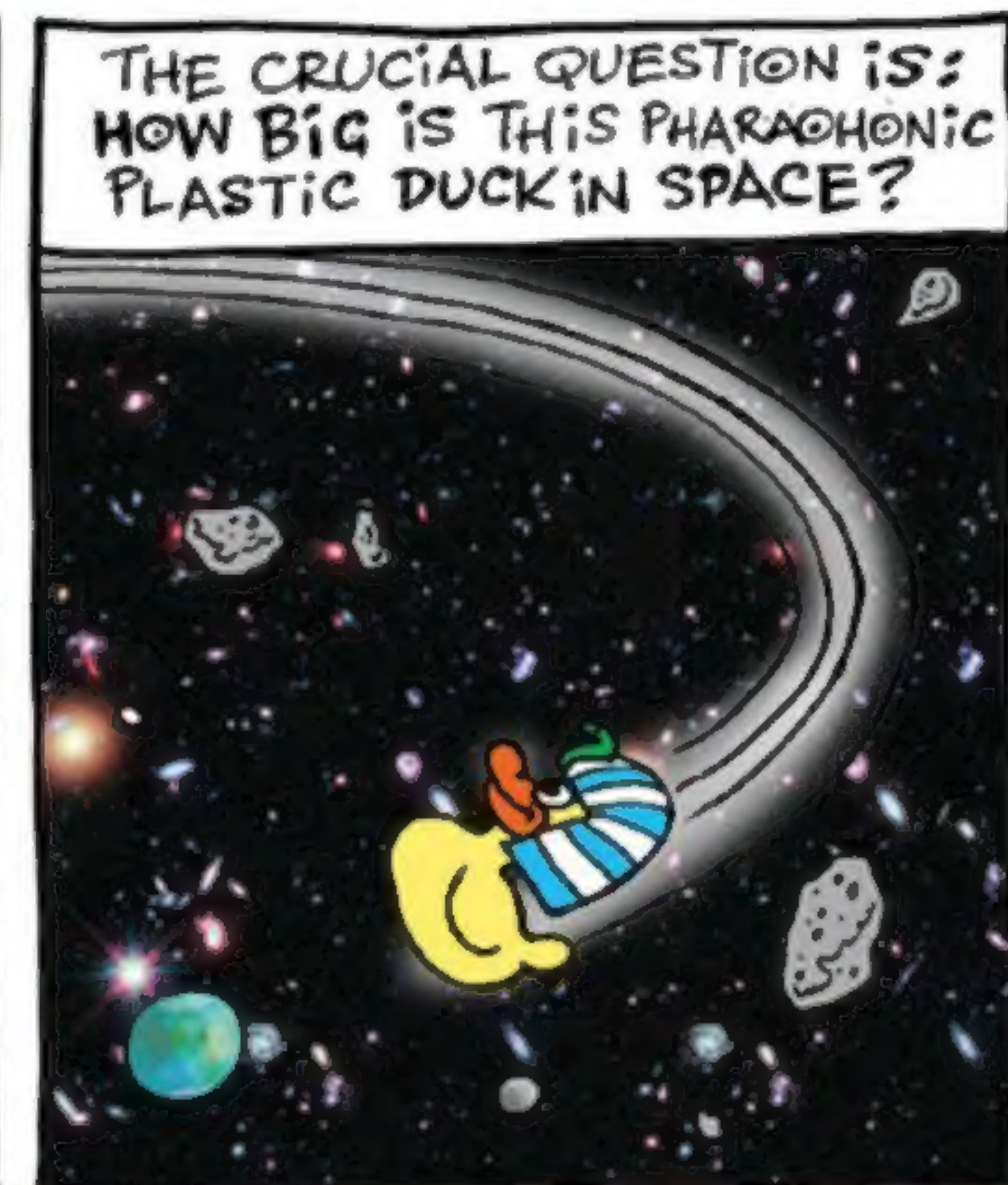
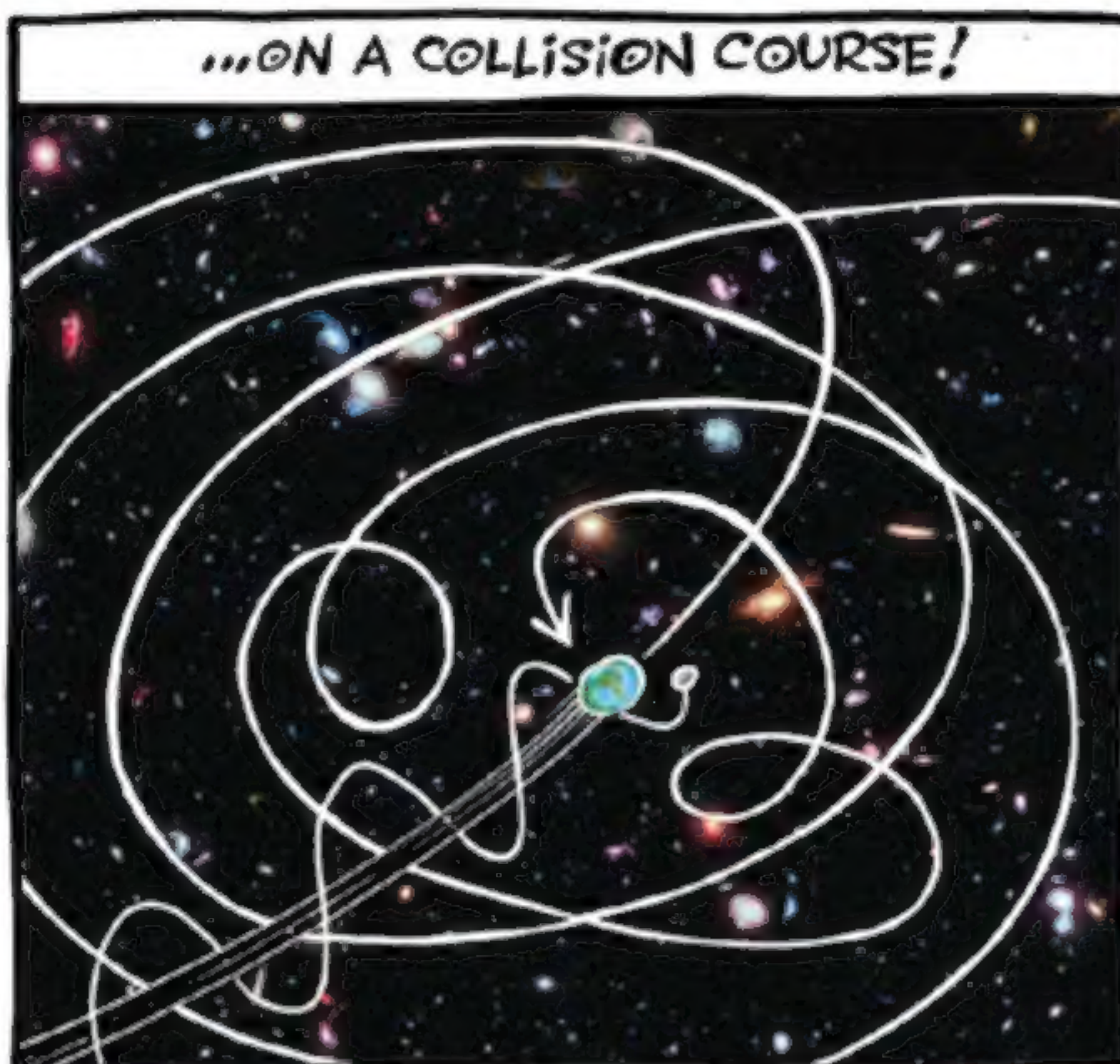
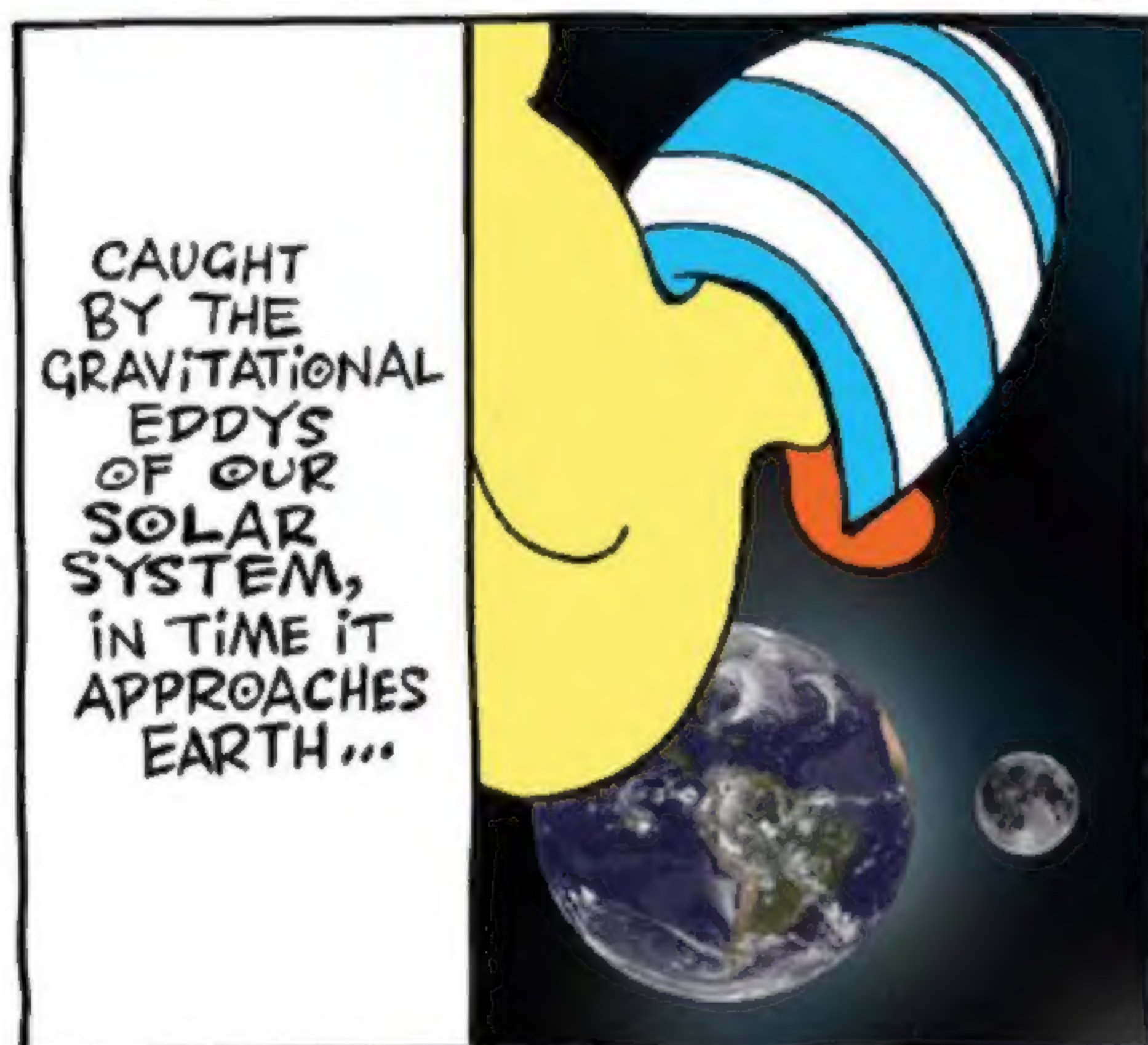
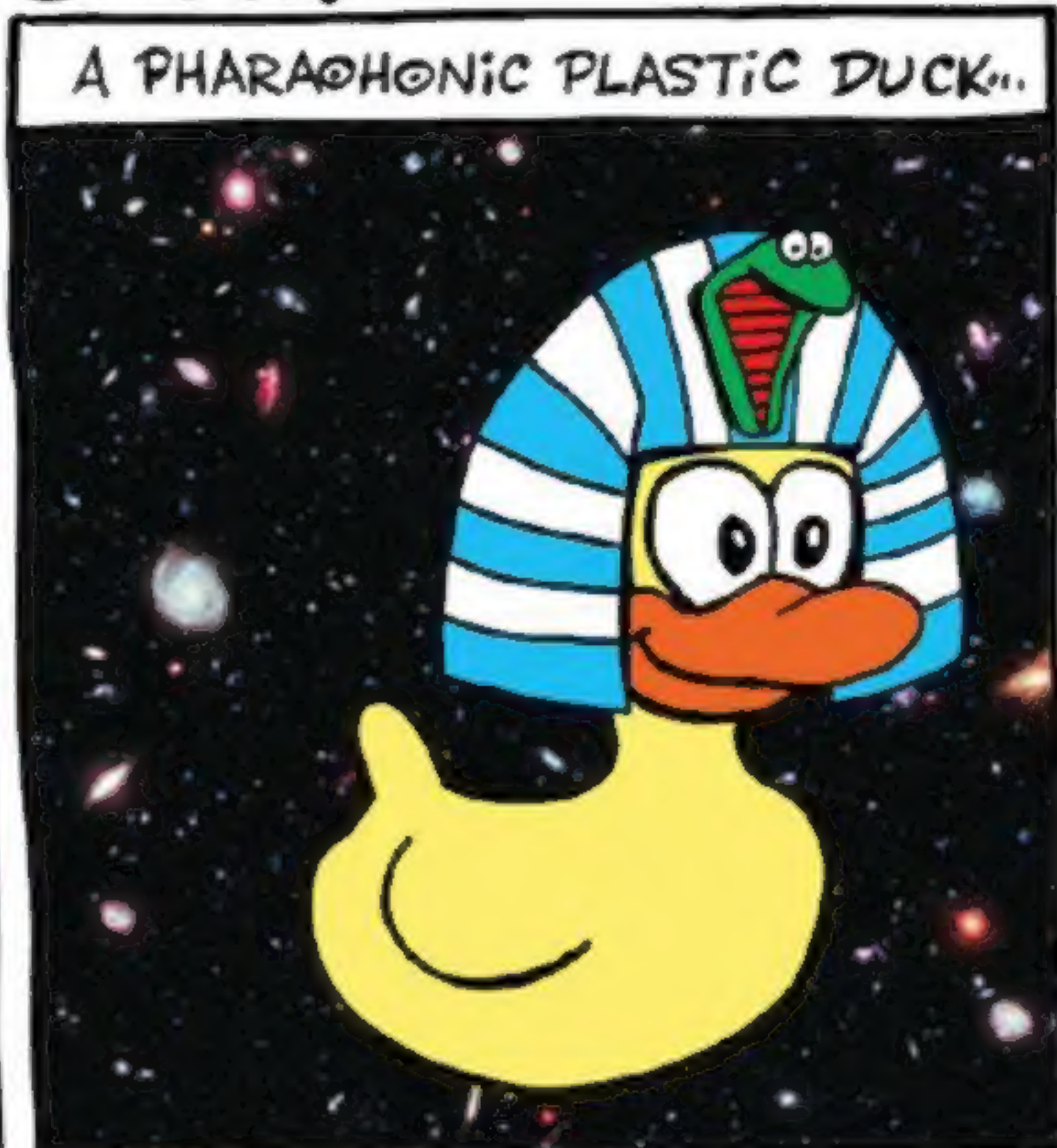
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STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

As Santos Herrera, 22, was driving a bus on the El Caracol-La Rica route between the cities of Jinotega and San Sebastián de Yalí in Nicaragua, the vehicle experienced mechanical problems that led to him losing control of it. The bus slewed off the road and went crashing down a 160ft (50m) deep ravine, smashing its way through a collection of beehives as it did so. This stirred up a swarm of angry African bees, known for their painful stings and short tempers, which descended on the wreckage of the bus and attacked the survivors. Local residents attempted to reach the injured but were driven off by the bees. Amazingly, no one died in the crash itself, but Kenia Soza, 19, Dilia Amparo, 32, Santos Calderón, 38, Reyna Olivas, 84, Eneyda Tórrez, 47, and her eight-year-old daughter Andrea Carolina García all died from bee stings inflicted after the crash. In all, 45 of the 60 bus passengers suffered severe bee stings in the incident and 14 of them, including a four-year-old boy and a pregnant woman were hospitalised, having been stung hundreds of times. *D.Telegraph, 9 May 2023.*

At the Wat Ban Non Kaet temple in Si Sa Ket, Thailand, temple employee Saranyu Kanyamai, 40, was helping his colleague Adisak to move a 200kg (440lb) golden Buddha statue in preparation for a royal cremation ceremony, when it fell on top of them. Medics called to the scene found Adisak and Kanyami trapped under the statue, but while it had fallen on Adisak's legs, inflicting severe injuries, it had crushed Kanyami's chest, and he was declared dead. "The temple did not have enough hands, which may have contributed to the accident", said Lieutenant Colonel Apisit Supho from the Muang Si Sa Ket police station, while the temple abbot said that the statue was being put in place to bring good luck to devotees praying there. *metro.co.uk, 29 June 2023.*

Also in Thailand, police called to a forest park in Isaan province of Nong Bua Lamphu found the body of 39-year-old Praditsin Chuypad lying on the grass with his trousers soaked in blood. A strimmer he had been using was found nearby, with a broken metal cutting blade. The forest park's caretaker, Waen Visetsakda, 72, said that Chuypad had been hired to cut grass in the park,

but had used a blade meant for cutting metal on the strimmer in order to do the job more quickly. The blade had snapped while he was using it and a chunk of metal had hit Chuypad in the groin area, severing his penis and tearing an artery in his groin so that he bled to death before help could arrive. *thethaiger.com, 29 June 2023.*

Authorities in Forsyth County, Georgia, were at a loss to explain the death of a 24-year-old man at Lake Lanier. The man had jumped into the lake to cool off during very hot weather and suffered a massive electric shock the moment he hit the water. He was rushed to hospital but died later. Police and officials from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources could not find any source of electricity in the vicinity of the incident and could not explain how the man had been electrocuted. Lake Lanier is an artificial reservoir constructed in the 1950s and has a sinister reputation as one of the most haunted bodies of water in the US. According to writer Zoe Yarborough, "Many of the structures, buildings, and roads that were flooded during the lake's creation were left as is. Divers find eerie relics of streets, walls, and houses intact, like an abandoned ghost town on the lake's bottom... there are 20 cemeteries with headstones and graves still at the bottom of the lake that were never removed. The ancestors of the disrupted populations were never relocated, thus sparking many stories of haunted encounters." *mirror.co.uk, 30 July 2023.*

Emergency services "took about 12 hours" to locate the body of Giacomo Chiapparini, 74, in his cheese warehouse in Romano di Lombardia near Bergamo, Italy. He had been checking on ripening wheels of grana padano, a hard cheese resembling parmesan, each of which weighs about 40kg (88lb). These were stored in the warehouse on racks of metal shelving up to 10 metres (33ft) high, and when a shelf broke it caused a cascade of the giant cheeses. This, in turn, triggered a domino effect, bringing down other shelves and causing thousands of wheels to crash to the floor, crushing Chiapparini to death beneath them. Rescuers "had to move the cheeses and the shelves by hand" to reach Chiapparini's body, said firefighter Antonio Dusi. *theguardian.com, 7 Aug 2023.*



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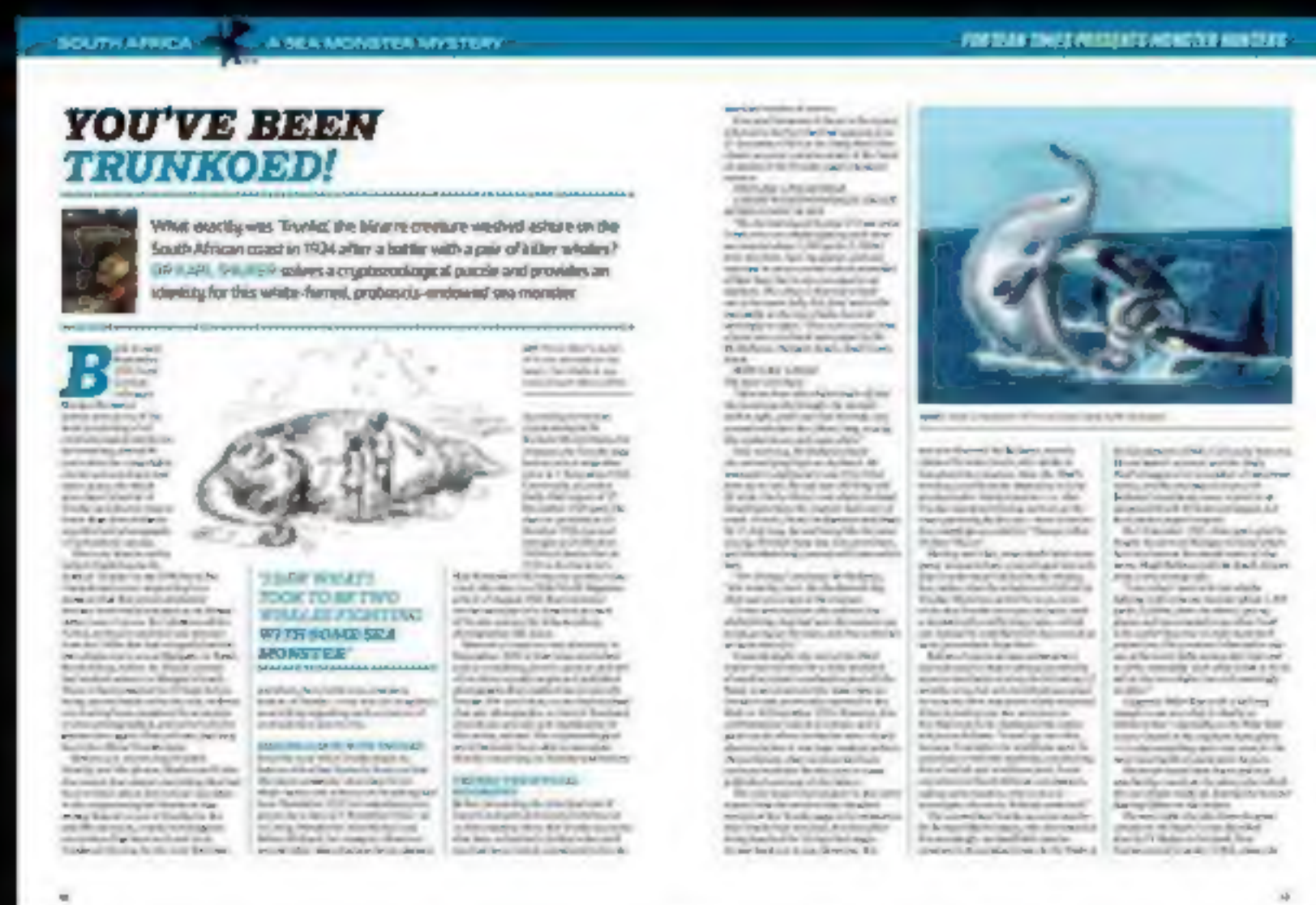


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